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A WHITE SAIL GLEAMS

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A FEW WORDS ABOUT MYSELF

Looking back on my life, I recall to mind some episodes that were instrumental in shaping my understanding of the writer's mission.

The power of the printed word was first really brought home to me when I landed at the front during the First World War. I mentally crossed out nearly all I had written up until then and resolved that from now on everything I write should benefit the workers, peasants and soldiers, and all working people.

In 1919, when I was in the ranks of the Red Army and was marching shoulder to shoulder with revolutionary Red Army men against Denikin's bands, I vowed to myself that I would dedicate my pen to the cause of the revolution.

Many Soviet writers took part in the Civil War, and their words and their actions inspired the fighting men. Alexander Serafimovich was a war correspondent. Alexander Fadeyev shared the privations of the Far Eastern partisans. Dmitry Furmanov was the Commissar of Chapayev's division. Nikolai Ostrovsky fought the interventionists in the Ukraine. Mikhail Sholokhov took part in the fighting against Whiteguard bands. Eduard Bagritsky went to the front as a member of a travelling propaganda team. More than 400 Soviet

writers gave their lives on the battlefronts of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45. Their names are inscribed on a marble memorial plaque in the Writers Club in Moscow.

At the time of the Russian revolution of 1905 I was just a boy of eight, but I clearly remember the battleship *Potemkin,* a red flag on her mast, sailing along the coast past Odessa. I witnessed the fighting on the barricades, I saw overturned horse-trams, twisted and torn street wires, revolvers, rifles, dead bodies.

Many years later I wrote *A White Sail Gleams (*Written in 1936.—*Ed.) a* novel in which I tried to convey the invigorating spirit that had been infused into the life of Russia by her first revolution.

A Son of the Working People is a reminiscence of the First World War, in which I fought.

When construction of the Dnieper hydroelectric power station began I went there together with the poet Demyan Bedny. Afterwards we visited collective farms in the Don and Volga areas and then set out for the Urals.

I remember that when our train stopped at Mount Magnitnaya in the Urals I was so impressed by what I saw that I decided to leave the train at once and remain in the town of Magnitogorsk. I said good-bye to Demyan Bedny and jumped down from the carriage.

"Good-bye and good luck!" he called out. "If I were younger and didn't have to get back to Moscow I'd stay here with pleasure."

I was struck by all I saw in Magnitogorsk, by the great enthusiasm of the people *building for themselves.* This was a revolution too. It inspired my book *Time, Forward!* During the last war, as a correspondent at the front, I saw a great deal, but for some reason it was the youngsters that made the biggest impression on me—the homeless, destitute boys who marched grimly along the war-torn roads. I saw exhausted, grimy, hungry Russian soldiers pick up the unfortunate children. This was a manifestation of the great humanism of the Soviet man. Those soldiers were fighting against fascism, and therefore they, too, were beacons of the revolution. This prompted me to write *Son of the Regiment.*

When I look around today I see the fruits of the events of 1917, of our technological revolution, of the construction work at Magnitogorsk. I see that my friends did not give their lives on the battlefronts in vain.

What does being a Soviet writer mean? Here is how I got the answer.

Returning home one day, a long time ago, I found an envelope with foreign stamps on it in my letter-box. Inside there was an invitation from the Pen Club, an international literary association, to attend its next conference, in Vienna. I was a young writer then, and I was greatly flattered. I told everyone I met about the remarkable honour that had been accorded me. When I ran into Vladimir Mayakovsky in one of the editorial offices I showed him the letter from abroad. He calmly

produced an elegant envelope exactly like mine from the pocket of his jacket.

"Look," he said. "They invited me too, but I'm not boasting about it. Because they did not invite me, of course, as Mayakovsky, but as a representative of Soviet literature. The same applies to you. Understand? Reflect, Kataich (as he called me when he was in a good mood), on what it means to be a writer in the Land of Soviets."

Mayakovsky's words made a lasting impression on me. I realised that I owed by success as a creative writer to the Soviet people, who had reared me. I realised that being a Soviet writer means marching in step with the people, that it means being always on the crest of the revolutionary wave.

In my short story *The Flag*, which is based on a wartime episode, the nazis have surrounded a group of Soviet fighting men and called on them to give up. But instead of the white flag of surrender they ran up a crimson flag which they improvised from pieces of cloth of different shades of red.

Similarly, Soviet literature is made up of many works of different shades which, taken together, shine like a fiery-red banner of the revolution.

Once, walking round Shanghai I wandered into the market where the so-called "Temple of the City Mayor" stood. Here they sold candles for church-goers. An old Chinese woman was standing at a table giving out some strange sticks from two vases. For ten yuans you were allowed to take one of these sticks

with hieroglyphics on it. Then the woman would ask you what number page was marked on the stick, and turning to her book for reference, she would find the appropriate page, tear it out and give it to you. On my piece of paper was written: "The Phoenix sings before the sun. The Empress takes no notice. It is difficult to alter the will of the Empress, but your name will live for centuries."

We haven't got an Empress, and so that part of the prophecy does not apply. It's highly unlikely that my name will live for centuries, and so that part doesn't apply either.

All that remains is the phrase "The Phoenix sings before the sun". I can agree with that since the sun is my homeland.

1

THE FAREWELL

The blast of the horn came from the farmyard at about five o'clock in the morning.

A piercing, penetrating sound that seemed split into hundreds of musical strands, it flew out through the apricot orchard into the deserted steppe and towards the sea, where its rolling echo died mournfully along the bluff.

That was the first signal for the departure of the coach.

It was all over. The bitter hour of farewell had come.

Strictly speaking, there was no one to bid farewell to. The few summer residents, frightened by recent events, had begun to leave in mid-season.

The only guests now remaining at the farm were Vasili Petrovich Batchei, an Odessa schoolmaster, and his two sons, one three and a half years old and the other eight and a half. The elder was called Petya, and the younger Pavlik. Today they too were leaving for home.

It was for them the horn had been blown and the big black horses led out of the stable.

Petya woke up long before the horn. He had slept fitfully. The twittering of the birds roused him, and he dressed and went outside.

The orchard, the steppe, and the farmyard all lay in a chill shadow. The sun was rising out of the sea, but the high bluff still hid it from view.

Petya wore his city Sunday suit, which he had quite outgrown during the summer: a navy-blue woollen sailor blouse with a white-edged collar, short trousers, long lisle stockings, button-shoes, and a broad-brimmed straw hat.

Shivering from the cold, he walked slowly round the farm, saying good-bye to the places where he had spent such a wonderful summer.

All summer long Petya had run about practically naked. He was now as brown as an Indian and could walk barefoot over burrs and thorns. He had gone swimming three times a day. At the beach he used to smear himself from head to foot with the red marine clay and then scratch out designs on his chest. That made him really look like a Red Indian, especially when he stuck into his hair the blue feathers of those marvellously beautiful birds—real fairy-tale birds—which built their nests in the bluff. And now, after all that wealth and freedom, to have to walk about in a tight woollen sailor blouse, in prickly stockings, in shoes that pinched, and in a big straw hat with an elastic that rubbed against his ears and pressed into his neck!

Petya lifted his hat and pushed it back so that it dangled on his shoulders like a basket.

Two fat ducks waddled past, quacking busily. They threw a look of scorn at this foppish boy, as though he were a stranger, and then dived under the fence one after the other.

Whether they had deliberately snubbed him or simply failed to recognise him, Petya could not be sure, yet all of a sudden he felt so sad and heavy-hearted that he wanted to cry.

Straight to his heart cut the feeling that he was a complete stranger in this cold and deserted world of early morning. Even the pit in the corner of the garden —the deep, wonderful pit where it was such thrilling fun to bake potatoes in a camp-fire—even that seemed unbelievably strange, unfamiliar.

The sun was rising higher.

The farmyard and orchard still lay in the shade, but the bright, cold, early rays were already gilding the pink, yellow, and blue pumpkins set out on the reed roof of the clay hut where the watchman lived.

The sleepy-eyed cook, in a homespun chequered skirt and a blouse of unbleached linen embroidered in black and red cross-stitch, with an iron comb in her dishevelled hair, was knocking yesterday's dead coals out of the samovar, against the doorstep.

Petya stood in front of the cook watching the string of beads jump up and down on her old, wrinkled neck.

"Going away?" she asked indifferently.

"Yes," the boy replied. His voice shook.

"Good luck to you."

She went over to the water-barrel, wrapped the hem of her chequered skirt round her hand, and pulled out the spigot.

A thick stream of water arched out and struck the ground. Sparkling round drops scattered, enveloping themselves in powdery grey dust.

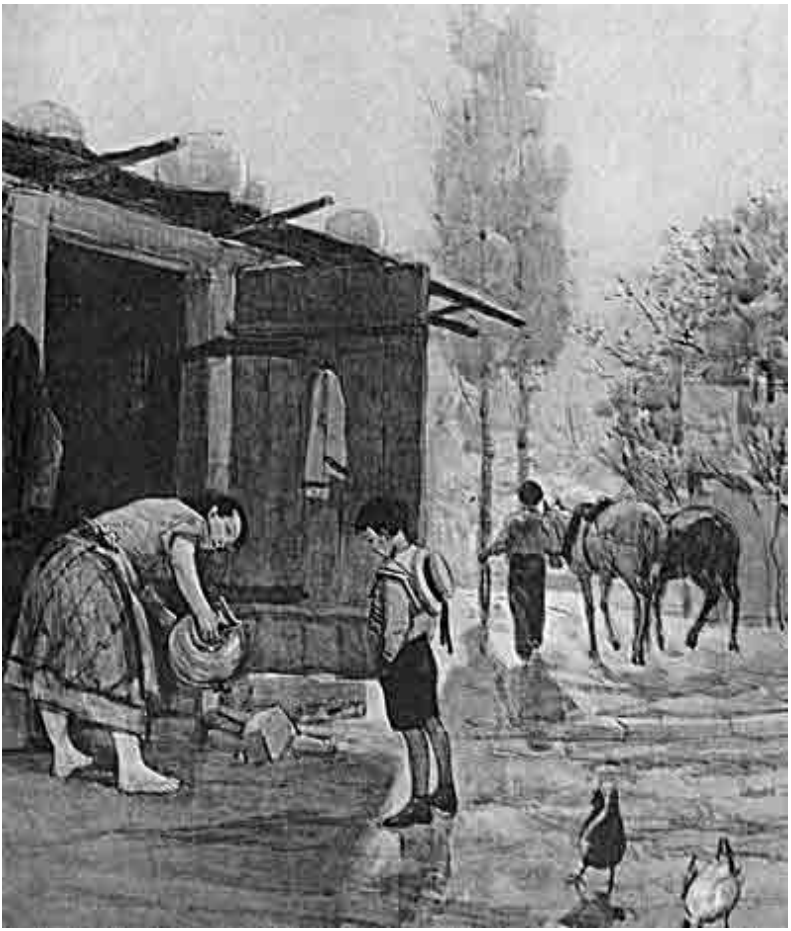
The cook set the samovar under the stream. It moaned as the fresh, heavy water poured into it. No, not a particle of sympathy from anybody! There was the same unfriendly silence and the same air of desolation everywhere—on the croquet square, in the meadow, in the arbour.

Yet how gay and merry it had been here such a short while ago! How many pretty girls and naughty boys! How many pranks, scenes, games, fights, quarrels, peacemakings, kisses, friendships!

What a wonderful party the owner of the farm, Rudolf Karlovich, had given for the summer residents on the birthday of his wife, Luiza Frantsevna! Petya would never forget that celebration. In the morning a huge table with bouquets of wild flowers on it was set under the apricot trees. In the centre lay a cake as big as a bicycle wheel.

Thirty-five lighted candles, by which one could tell Luiza Frantsevna's age, had been stuck into that rich, thickly frosted cake.

All the summer residents were invited to morning tea under the apricot trees.



The day continued as merrily as it had begun. It ended in the evening with a costume ball for the children, with music and fireworks.

All the children put on the fancy dress that had been made for them. The girls turned into mermaids and Gipsies, the boys into Red Indians, robbers, Chinese

mandarins, sailors. They all wore splendid, bright-coloured cotton or paper costumes.

There were rustling tissue-paper skirts and cloaks, artificial roses swaying on wire stems, and tambourines with floating silk ribbons.

Naturally—how could it be otherwise!—the very best costume was Petya's. Father himself had spent two days making it. His pince-nez kept falling off his nose while he worked; he was nearsighted, and every time he upset the bottle of glue he muttered into his beard frightful curses at the people who had arranged "this outrage" and generally expressed his disgust with "this nonsensical idea".

But of course, he was simply playing safe. He was afraid the costume might turn out a failure, he was afraid of disgracing himself. How he tried! But then the costume—say what you will!—was a remarkable one.

It was a real knight's suit of armour, made of strips of gold and silver Christmas tree paper cleverly pasted together and stretched over a wire frame. The helmet was decorated with a flowing plume and looked exactly like the helmet of a knight out of Sir Walter Scott. What is more, the visor could be raised and lowered.

In short, it was so magnificent that Petya was placed beside Zoya to make up the second couple. Zoya was the prettiest girl at the farm, and she wore the pink costume of a Good Fairy.

Arm in arm they walked round the garden, which was hung with Chinese lanterns. Here and there in the

mysterious darkness loomed trees and bushes unbelievably bright in the flare of red and green Bengal lights.

In the arbour, by the light of candles under glass shades, the grown-ups had their supper. Moths flew to the light from all sides and fell, singed, to the table-cloth.

Four hissing rockets rose out of the thick smoke of the Bengal lights and climbed slowly into the sky.

There was a moon, too. Petya and Zoya discovered this fact only when they found themselves in the very farthest part of the garden. Moonlight so bright and magic shone through the leaves that even the whites of the girl's eyes were a luminous blue—the same blue that danced in the tub of dark water under the old apricot tree, in which a toy boat floated.

Here, before they knew it, the boy and girl kissed. Then they were so embarrassed that they dashed off headlong with wild shouts, and they ran and ran until they landed in the backyard. There the farm labourers who had come to congratulate the mistress were having their own party.

On a pine table brought from the servants' kitchen stood a keg of beer, two jugs of vodka, a bowl of fried fish, and a wheaten loaf. The drunken cook, in a new print blouse with frills, was angrily serving the merry-makers portions of fish and filling their mugs. A concertina-player, his coat unbuttoned and his knees spread apart, swayed from side to side on a stool as his

fingers rambled over the bass keys of the wheezing instrument.

Two straight-backed fellows with impassive faces had taken each other by the waist and were stamping out a polka, with much flourishing of the heels. Several women labourers in brand-new kerchiefs and tight kid pumps, their cheeks smeared with the juice of pickled tomatoes— for coquetry and to soften the skin—stood with their arms round one another.

Rudolf Karlovich and Luiza Frantsevna were backing away from one of the labourers.

He was as drunk as a lord. Several men were holding him back. He strained to get free. Blood spurted from his nose on his Sunday shirt, which was ripped down the middle. He was swearing furiously.

Sobbing and choking over his frenzied words, and grinding his teeth the way people do in their sleep, he shouted: "Three rubles and fifty kopeks for two months of slaving! Miser! Let me get at the bastard! Just let me get at him! I'll choke the life out of him! Matches, somebody! Let me get at the straw! I'll give them a birthday party! If only Grishka Kotovsky was here, you rat!"

(Grigori Kotovsky (1887-1925) was active in the agrarian movement in Bessarabia in 1905-1906; he was a leader of the Bessarabian peasants' partisan actions against the landowners. In 1918-1920 this son of the people was an army leader and Civil War hero.—*Tr.)*

The moonlight gleamed in his rolling eyes.

"Now, now," muttered the master, backing away. "You look out, Gavrila. Don't go too far. You can be hanged nowadays for that sort of talk."

"Go ahead, hang me!" the labourer shouted, panting. "Why don't you? Go ahead, bloodsucker!"

This was so terrifying, so puzzling, and, above all, so out of keeping with the spirit of the wonderful party, that the children ran back, screaming that Gavrila wanted to cut Rudolf Karlovich's throat and set fire to the farm.

The panic that broke out is difficult to imagine.

The parents led the children to their rooms. They locked all the doors and closed all the windows, as though a storm were brewing. The rural prefect Chuvyakov, who had come to spend a few days with his family, marched across the croquet square, kicking out the hoops and scattering the balls and mallets.

He carried a double-barrelled gun at the ready.

In vain did Rudolf Karlovich plead with the summer residents to be calm. In vain did he assure them that there was no danger, that Gavrila was now bound and locked up in the cellar, and that tomorrow the constable would come for him.

Once, in the night, a red glow lit up the sky far over the steppe. The next morning it was rumoured that a neighbouring farm had been burned down. Labourers had set it on fire, it was said.

People coming from Odessa reported disturbances in the city. There were rumours that the trestle bridge in the port was on fire.

The constable arrived at dawn the next morning. He led Gavrila away. In his sleep Petya heard the bells of the constable's troika.

The summer residents began to leave for home.

Soon the farm was deserted.

Petya lingered under the old apricot tree, beside the tub of such fond memory, and struck the water with a twig. No, the tub wasn't the same, the water wasn't the same, and even the old apricot tree was not the same!

Everything, absolutely everything, had become different. Everything had lost its magic. Everything looked at Petya as out of the remote past.

Would the sea also be so cold and heartless to him this last time?

Petya ran to the bluff.

2

THE SEA

The low sun beat blindingly into his eyes. Below, the entire sweep of the sea was like burning magnesium. Here the steppe ended suddenly.

Silvery bushes of wild olive quivered in the shimmering air at the edge of the bluff.

A steep path zigzagged downwards. Petya was used to running down the path barefoot. His shoes bothered him; the soles were slippery. His feet ran of themselves. It was impossible to stop them.

Until the first turn he still managed to resist the pull of gravity. He dug in his heels and clutched at the dry roots hanging over the path. But the roots were rotten and they broke. The clay crumbled beneath his heels. A cloud of dust as fine and brown as cocoa enveloped him.

The dust got into his nose; it tickled his throat. Petya very soon had enough of that. Oh, he'd risk it!

He cried out at the top of his lungs, and, with a wave of his arms, plunged headlong.

His hat filled with air and bobbed up and down behind him. His collar fluttered in the wind. Burrs stuck to his stockings. After frightful leaps down the huge steps of the natural stairway, the boy suddenly flew out on the dry sand of the shore. The sand felt cold; it had not yet been warmed by the sun. This sand

was amazingly white and fine. It was deep, soft, marked all over with the shapeless holes of yesterday's footprints, and looked like semolina of the very best quality.

The beach slanted almost imperceptibly towards the water. The last strip of sand, lapped by broad tongues of snow-white foam, was damp, dark, and smooth; it was firm, easy to walk on.

This was the most wonderful beach in the world, stretching for about a hundred miles under the bluffs from Karolino-Bugaz to the mouth of the Danube, then the border of Rumania. At that early hour it seemed wild and desolate.

The sensation of loneliness gripped Petya with new force. But this time it was quite different; it was a proud and manly kind of loneliness. He was Robinson Crusoe on his desert island.

The first thing Petya did was to study the footprints. He had the experienced, penetrating eye of a seeker after adventures.

He was surrounded by footprints. He read them as though he were reading Mayne Reid.

The black spot on the face of the bluff and the grey ashes meant that natives had landed from a canoe the night before and had cooked a meal over a camp-fire. The fan-like tracks of gulls meant a dead calm at sea and lots of small fish near the shore.

The long cork with a French trademark and the bleached slice of lemon thrown up on the sand by the

waves left no doubt that a foreign ship had sailed by far out at sea several days before.

Meanwhile the sun had climbed a bit higher above the horizon. Now the sea no longer shone all over but only in two places: in a long strip at the very horizon and in another near the shore, where a dozen blinding stars flashed in the mirror of the waves as they stretched themselves out neatly on the sand.

Over the rest of its vast expanse the sea shone in the August calm with such a tender and such a melancholy blue that Petya could not help recalling:

A white sail gleams, so far and lonely,
Through the blue haze above the foam. . .

although there was no sail in -sight and the sea wasn't the least misty.

He gazed spellbound at the sea.

. . . No matter how long you look at the sea, you never tire of it. The sea is always different, always new.

It changes from hour to hour, before your very eyes.

Now it is pale-blue and quiet, streaked here and there with the whitish paths you see during a calm. Or a vivid dark-blue, flaming and glistening. Or covered with dancing white horses. Or, if the wind is fresh, suddenly dark indigo and looking like wool when you run your hand against the nap. When a storm breaks, it changes threateningly. The wind whips up a great swell. Screaming gulls dart across the slate-coloured

sky. The churning waves roll and toss the shiny carcass of a dead dolphin along the shore. The sharp green of the horizon stands out like a jagged wall over the mud-coloured storm clouds. The malachite panels of the breakers, veined with sweeping zigzag lines, crash against the shore with the thunder of cannon. Amid the roar, the echoes reverberate with a brassy ring. The spray hangs in a fine mist, like a muslin veil, all the way to the top of the shaken bluffs.

But the supreme spell of the sea lies in the eternal mystery hidden in its expanses.

Is not its phosphorescence a mystery—when you dip your arm into the warm black water on a moonless July night and see it suddenly gleam all over with blue dots? Or the moving lights of unseen ships and the slow faint flashes pf an unknown beacon? Or the grains of sand, too many for the human mind to grasp?

. . . And finally, was not the sight of the revolutionary battleship which once appeared far out at sea, full of mystery?

Its appearance was preceded by a fire in the port of Odessa. The glow could be seen forty miles away. At once rumours spread that the trestle bridge was burning.

Then the word *Potemkin* was spoken.

(A battleship of the Black Sea Fleet whose sailors mounted a heroic revolt in 1905 and went over to the side of the revolution. Warships were dispatched to put down the revolt, but the sailors of these vessels refused to fire on the insurgents. However, the red flag did not wave from the mast of the

Potemkin for long. The absence of a united leadership of the revolt, and the shortage of provisions and coal compelled the sailors to surrender.

The revolt of the battleship *Potemkin* played a role of immense importance in the development of the Russian revolutionary movement.—*Tr*.)

Several times the revolutionary battleship, solitary and mysterious, appeared on the horizon in sight of the Bessarabian shore.

The farm labourers would drop their work and come out to the bluff to catch a glimpse of the distant thread of smoke. Sometimes they thought they saw it. They would snatch off their caps and shirts and wave them furiously, greeting the insurgents.

But Petya, to tell the truth, could not make out a thing in the desert vastness of the sea, no matter how much he screwed up his eyes.

Except once. Through a spyglass which he had begged for a minute from another boy, he made out the light-green silhouette of the three-funnelled battleship flying a red flag at its mast.

The ship was speeding westward, in the direction of Rumania.

The next day a lowering cloud of smoke spread out along the horizon. That was the whole of the Black Sea squadron in pursuit of the *Potemkin.*

Fishermen who sailed up in their big black boats from the mouth of the Danube brought the rumour that the *Potemkin* had reached Constantsa, where she had

to surrender to the Rumanian government. Her crew went ashore and scattered in all directions.

At dawn one morning, after several more days of alarm, a line of smoke again covered the horizon.

That was the Black Sea squadron returning from Constantsa to Sevastopol with the captured insurgent in tow, as if on a lariat.

Deserted, without her crew, her engines flooded, her flag of revolt lowered, the *Potemkin*, surrounded by a close convoy of smoke, moved slowly ahead, dipping ponderously in the swell. It took the ship a long time to pass the high bluffs of Bessarabia, where her progress was followed in silence by the farmhands, border guards, fishermen. . . . They stood there looking until the entire squadron disappeared from view.

Again the sea became as calm and gentle as though blue oil had been poured over it.

Meanwhile details of mounted police had appeared on the steppe roads. They had been sent to the Rumanian border to capture the runaway sailors from the *Potemkin*.

. . . Petya decided to have a last quick swim.

But no sooner had he taken a running dive into the sea and begun to swim on his side, cleaving the cool water with his smooth brown shoulder, than he forgot everything in the world.

First he swam across the deep spot near the shore to the sand-bank.

There he stood up and began to walk about knee-deep in the transparent water, examining the sandy bottom with its distinct fish-scale pattern.

At first glance the bottom seemed uninhabited. But a good close look revealed living things. Moving across the wrinkles of the sand, now appearing, now burying themselves, were tiny hermit crabs. Petya picked one up from the bottom and skilfully pulled the crab—it even had tiny nippers!—out of its shell.

Girls liked to string those little shells on twine. They made fine necklaces. But men didn't go in for that sort of thing.

Then Petya caught sight of a jellyfish and went after it. The jellyfish hung like a transparent lamp-shade, with a fringe of tentacles just as transparent. It seemed to hang motionless—but that was not really so. The thin blue gelatinous margin of the thick cupola was breathing and rippling, like the edge of a parachute. The tentacles stirred too. The jellyfish moved slantwise towards the bottom, as though sensing danger.

But Petya caught up with it. Carefully, so as not to touch the poisonous edge which stung like nettles, he picked the jellyfish out of the water with both hands, by its cupola. Then he flung its weighty but flimsy body to the shore.

The jellyfish flew through the air, dropping some of its tentacles on the way, and then slapped against the wet sand. The sun immediately flared up in its slime like a silver star.

With a cry of delight Petya plunged from the sandbank into the deep water and took to his favourite sport: swimming underwater with eyes open.

What rapture!

Before the boy's enchanted gaze there spread the wonderful world of the submarine kingdom. Clearly visible, and enlarged as if by a magnifying glass, were pebbles of all colours. They made a cobble stoned road of the sea bed.

The stems of the sea plants were a fairy-tale forest shot through with the cloudy green rays of a sun now as pale as the moon.

A huge old crab was scampering along sidewise among the roots, his terrifying claws spread out like horns. On his spider-like legs he carried the bulging box that was his back; it was dotted with white stony warts.

Petya wasn't the least scared. He knew how to deal with crabs. You had to pick them up boldly, by the back, with two fingers. Then they couldn't bite.

But he was not interested in the crab. Let it crawl along in peace—crabs were no great rarity. The whole beach was strewn with their dry claws and red shells.

Sea horses were much more interesting.

Just then a small school of them appeared among the seaweed. With their chiselled faces and chests they looked for all the world like chess knights, except that they had tails, curled forward. They swam, standing upright, straight at Petya, spreading out their webbed fins like tiny underwater dragons.

It was clear they had never expected to run into a hunter at that early hour.

Petya's heart leaped with joy. He had only one sea horse in his collection, and a wrinkled old creature it was. These were big and handsome, every single one of them.

To let such a rare opportunity slip by would be sheer madness.

Petya rose to the surface to fill his lungs and start the hunt at once. But all of a sudden he caught sight of Father at the edge of the bluff.

He was waving his straw hat and shouting.

The bluff was so high and the voice made such a hollow echo that all Petya caught was a rolling ". . . ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh!. . ."

But he understood very well what that "ooh-ooh-ooh" meant. It meant: "Where did you disappear to, you rascal? I've been looking for you all over the farm. The coach is waiting. Do you want us to miss the boat because of you? Get out of the water at once, you good-for-nothing!"

Father's voice brought back to Petya the bitter feeling of parting with which he had awakened in the morning. He lifted his voice in such a desperate shout that it made his ears ring: "I'm coming! I'm coming!"

". . . ming-ming-ming!" the bluffs echoed.

Petya pulled on his suit right over his wet body—very pleasant that was, too, if the truth be told—and hurried up the bluff.

3

IN THE STEPPE

The coach already stood in the road, in front of the gate. The driver had climbed up on a wheel and was tying to the roof the canvas camp beds of the departing summer residents and also round baskets of blue egg-plants which the farm owner, taking advantage of the occasion, was sending to Akkerman.

Little Pavlik, dressed for the journey in a new blue pinafore and a stiffly-starched pique hat that looked like a jelly-mould, stood at a prudent distance from the horses. He was making a deep and detailed study of their harness.

He was amazed beyond words to find that this harness —the real harness of real live horses—was totally unlike the harness of his beautiful papier mache horse, Kudlatka. (Kudlatka, who had not been taken to the country, was now awaiting her master in Odessa.)

The shopkeeper who sold them Kudlatka had probably got something wrong!

At any rate, he had to remember to ask Daddy as soon as they came home to cut out a pair of those lovely black things for the eyes and sew them on.

At the thought of Kudlatka, Pavlik felt a twinge of anxiety. How was she getting along in the attic without him? Was Auntie Tatyana giving her hay and oats? The

mice hadn't chewed off her tail, had they? True, there wasn't much of a tail left—two or three hairs and an upholstery nail, but still. . . .

Then, in a fit of impatience, Pavlik stuck his tongue out of the corner of his mouth and ran off to the house to hurry Daddy and Petya.

But worried though he was about the fate of Kudlatka, he did not for a moment forget about his new travelling-bag, which hung across his shoulder on a strap. He held it tight with both his little hands.

For in that bag, besides a bar of chocolate and a few Capitain salty biscuits, lay his chief treasure, a moneybox made out of an Ainem Cocoa tin. Here Pavlik kept the money he was saving to buy a bicycle.

He had put aside quite a sum already: about thirty-eight or thirty-nine kopeks.

Now Daddy and Petya were coming towards the coach after their breakfast of grey wheaten bread and milk still warm from the cow.

Under his arm Petya carefully carried his treasures: a jar of needle fish preserved in alcohol and a collection of butterflies, beetles, shells, and crabs.

All three bid a warm farewell to their hosts, who had come to the gate to see them off. Then they climbed into the coach and set out.

The road skirted the farm.

Its water pail rattling, the coach rolled along past the orchard, past the arbour, and past the cattle and poultry yards. Finally it reached the *garman*, the level, well-stamped platform where the grain is threshed and

winnowed. In Central Russia this platform is called a *tok*, but in Bessarabia it is a *garman.*

The straw world of the *garman* began just beyond the roadside embankment, overgrown with bushes of grey, dusty scratch weed on which hung thousands of tear-shaped yellowish-red berries.

There was a whole town of old and new straw ricks as big as houses, a town with real streets, lanes, and blind alleys. Here and there, beside the layered and blackened walls of very old straw, shoots of wheat broke their way through the firm and seemingly cast-iron earth; they glowed like emerald wicks, amazingly clear and bright.

Thick opalescent smoke poured from the chimney of the steam-engine. An unseen thresher whined persistently. The small figures of peasant women with pitchforks were walking knee-deep in wheat on top of a new rick.

The wheat on the pitchforks cast gliding shadows against the clouds of chaff pierced by the slanting rays of the sun.

Sacks, scales, and weights flashed by.

Then a tall mound of newly threshed wheat covered with a tarpaulin floated past.

After that the coach rolled out into the open steppe.

In a word, at first everything was the same as in the other years. The flat, deserted fields of stubble stretching on all sides for dozens of miles. The lone burial mound. The lilac-coloured immortelles gleaming

like mica. The marmot sitting beside his burrow. The piece of rope looking like a crushed snake. . . .

But suddenly a cloud of dust appeared ahead. A police detail was galloping down the road.

"Halt!"

The coach stopped.

One of the horsemen rode up.

Behind the green shoulder strap with a number on it bobbed the short barrel of a carbine. A dusty forage cap, worn at a slant, also bobbed up and down. The saddle creaked and gave off a strong hot smell of leather.

The snorting muzzle of the horse came to a stop at a level with the open window. Big teeth chewed at the white iron bit. Grassy-green foam dripped from the black rubbery lips. Out of the delicate pink nostrils a hot steamy breath poured over the three passengers.

The black lips stretched towards Petya's straw hat.

"Who's that inside?" a rough military voice shouted somewhere overhead.

"Summer residents. I'm taking them to the boat." The driver spoke quickly, in an unrecognisably thin and sugary voice. "They're bound for Akkerman and then straight to Odessa by boat. They've been living on a farm out here all summer. Ever since the beginning of June. Now they're on their way home."

"Well, let's have a look at 'em."

With these words a red face with yellow moustaches and eyebrows and a close-shaven chin,

and above it a cap with an oval badge on a green band, appeared at the window.

"Who are you?"

"Holiday-makers," said Father, smiling.

The soldier evidently did not like the smile or that breezy word "holiday-makers", which sounded to him like a jeer.

"I can see you're holiday-makers," he said with rough displeasure. "That don't tell me anything. Just *what* kind of holiday-makers are you?"

Father turned pale with indignation. His jaw began to quiver, and his little beard quivered too. He buttoned all the buttons of his summer coat with trembling fingers and adjusted his pince-nez.

"How dare you speak to me in that tone of voice?" he cried in a sharp falsetto. "I am Collegiate Counsellor Batchei, a high school teacher, and these are my two children, Peter and Paul. Our destination is Odessa."

Pink spots broke out on Father's forehead.

"Excuse me, Your Honour," the soldier said smartly, his pale eyes popping out of his head. He saluted with his whip hand. "I didn't know."

He looked as if he had been frightened to death by the "Collegiate Counsellor", a grim-sounding title he probably had never heard before.

"To the devil with him!" he thought. "He might land me in hot water. I might get it in the neck."

He put the spurs to his horse and galloped off.

"What an idiot!" Petya remarked, when the soldiers had ridden off a good distance.

Father again lost his temper. "Hold your tongue! How many times have I told you you mustn't dare say that word! People who regularly use the word 'idiot' are usually themselves—er—none too clever. Remember that."

At any other time, of course, Petya would have argued, but now he kept his peace.

He knew Father's state of mind perfectly.

Father, who always spoke of titles and medals with scornful irritation, who never wore his formal uniform or his Order of St. Anna, Third Class, who never recognised any social privileges and insisted that all the inhabitants of Russia were no more and no less than "citizens", had suddenly, in a fit of anger, said God knows what. And to whom! To an ordinary soldier.

"High school teacher" .. . "Collegiate Counsellor" . . . "How dare you speak to me in that tone of voice". . . .

"Ugh, what nonsense!" Petya read in Father's embarrassed face. "For shame!"

Meanwhile, in the general excitement, the driver had lost the thong of his whip; this always happened on long journeys. He was now walking along the road and poking with the whip-handle among the grey, dust-coated wormwood.

At last he found the thong. He tied it to the handle and pulled the knot with his teeth.

"Damn their souls!" he exclaimed as he came up to the coach. "All they do is ride up and down the roads and scare people."

"What do they want?" Father asked.

"God only knows. Hunting after somebody, no doubt. Day before yesterday somebody set fire to landlord Balabanov's farm, about thirty versts from here. They say it was a runaway sailor from the *Potemkin* did it. And now they're looking for that runaway sailor high and low. They say he's taken to cover somewhere in the steppe hereabouts. What a business! Well, time to get going."

With these words he climbed to his high box and took up the reins. The coach moved on.

The morning was as fine as ever, but now everybody's mood was spoiled.

In this wonderful world of the deep-blue sky with its wild droves of white-maned clouds, this world of lilac shadows running in waves from mound to mound over the steppe grasses, in which a horse's skull or a bullock's horns might be sighted at any moment, a world created, it would seem, for the sole purpose of man's joy and happiness— in this world, obviously, not all was well.

Such were the thoughts of Father, the driver, and Petya.

Pavlik, however, was occupied with thoughts of his own.

His attentive brown eyes were fixed on a point beyond the window, and his round, cream-coloured

little forehead, with the neat bang sticking out from under his hat, was knitted.

"Daddy," he said suddenly, without taking his eyes from the window. "Daddy, what's the Tsar?"

"What's the Tsar? I don't follow you."

"Well, what is he?"

"Hm. . . . A man."

"No, not that. I know he's a man. Don't you see? I mean not a man, but *what* is he? Understand?"

"No, I can't say that I do."

"I mean, *what* is he?"

"Ye Gods! What is he? Well, the crowned sovereign, if you like."

"Crowned? What with?"

Father gave Pavlik a severe look. "Wha-a-t?"

"If he's crowned, then what with? Don't you see? *What* with?"

"Stop talking nonsense!" Father said. He turned away angrily.

4

THE WATERING

At about ten o'clock in the morning they stopped in a large half-Moldavian, half-Ukrainian village to water the horses.

Father took Pavlik by the hand and went off to buy some cantaloupes. Petya remained near the horses. He wanted to see them being watered.

The horses which had pulled the big lumbering coach were led by the driver to the well; it was the kind known as a "crane-well".

The driver stuck his whip into his boot-top and took hold of the long pole that hung vertically and had a heavy oak bucket attached by a chain to the end. Moving one hand over the other up the pole, he lowered the bucket into the well. The sweep creaked. Its top end swung down, as if trying to peep into the well, while the other end, which had a large porous rock tied to it as a counterweight, glided upwards.

Petya flattened himself against the edge of the well and looked down into it as if it were a telescope.

The shaft was round, and its stone lining was covered with dark-brown velvety mould. It was very deep. In the cold darkness at the bottom there gleamed a tiny circle of water in which Petya saw his hat reflected with photographic distinctness.

He shouted. The well filled with a resounding roar, the way a clay pitcher does.

Down and down and down the bucket went. It became altogether tiny, but still it did not reach the water. Finally a faint splash sounded. The bucket sank into the water, gurgled, and then began to rise.

Heavy drops slapped down into the water, making noises like caps exploding.

The pole, polished by countless hands to the smoothness of glass, took a long time to rise. At last the wet chain appeared. The sweep creaked for the last time. The driver seized the heavy bucket with his strong hands and emptied it into the stone trough.

But first he drank out of the bucket himself. Then Petya drank. That was the most thrilling moment in the whole procedure of watering the horses.

The water was as transparent as could be, and as cold as ice. Petya dipped his nose and chin into it. The inside of the bucket was coated with a beard of green slime. The bucket and the slime had an almost weird fascination. There was something very, very old about them, something reminding him of the forest, of the Russian fairy-tale about the wooden mill, the Miller who was a sorcerer, the deep mill-pond, and the Frog Princess.

Petya's forehead immediately began to ache from the ice water. But it was a hot day, and he knew that the ache would soon pass.

He also knew for certain that about eight or ten buckets were needed to water the horses. That would take at least half an hour. Plenty of time for a stroll.

He carefully picked his way through the mud near the trough—mud as black as boot-polish and indented with hog tracks. Then he followed a gutter across a meadow strewn with goose down.

The gutter brought him to a bog overgrown with a tall forest of reeds, sedge and weeds.

Here cool twilight reigned even when the sun was its highest and brightest. A rush of heady odours struck Petya's nostrils.

The sharp odour of sedge mingled with the sweet and nutty smell of the headache shrubs, which actually did make your head ache.

The shrubs were sharp-leafed and covered with blackish-green bolls with fleshy prickles and long smelly flowers that were remarkably delicate and remarkably white. Beside them grew nightshade, henbane, and the mysterious sleeping-grass.

On the path sat a big frog, its eyes closed as though it were bewitched. Petya tried with all his might to keep from looking at the frog: he was afraid he might see a little golden crown on its head.

For that matter, the whole place seemed bewitched, like the forests in fairy-tales.

Surely somewhere nearby wandered the slender, large-eyed Alyonushka, weeping bitterly over her brother Ivanushka. . ..

And if a little white lamb had suddenly run out from the thicket and bleated in a thin baby voice, Petya certainly would have been frightened out of his wits.

The boy decided not to think about the little lamb. But the more he tried not to, the more he did. And the more he did, the more he was afraid to be alone in the black greenness of this bewitched place.

He screwed up his eyes as tight as he could, to keep from crying out, and fled from the poisonous thicket.

He did not stop running until he found himself at the backyard of a small farm.

Behind the wattle fence, on the stakes of which hung a whole collection of clay pitchers, Petya saw a pleasant little *garman*, its small arena covered with wheat fresh from the fields. In the middle of it stood a girl of about eleven in a long gathered skirt, a short print blouse with puffed sleeves, and a kerchief that came down to her eyes.

She stood there shielding her eyes against the sun with her elbow and shifting her bare feet as she drove round the circle, by a long rope, two horses harnessed one ahead of the other. Scattering the straw lightly with their hoofs, the horses pulled a ribbed stone roller over the thick layer of shining wheat. The roller bounced heavily but noiselessly.

A wide board, bent upward in front like a ski, dragged behind the roller.

Petya knew that the bottom of the board was fitted with a lot of sharp yellow flints which did an especially good job of knocking the grain out of the ears.

The board slid along quickly. On it stood a lad of Petya's age, in a faded shirt unbuttoned at the collar, and a cap with the peak over one ear; he had a hard time keeping his balance, but he did it with a dashing air, as though he were sliding downhill standing up on a toboggan.

At his feet a tiny fair-haired girl sat on her haunches, like a mouse; with both her hands she kept a convulsive grip on one of her brother's trouser-legs.

Round the circle ran an old man, stirring the wheat with a wooden pitchfork and throwing it under the horses' feet. The circle kept spreading out, and an old woman was shaping it with a long paddle.

A short distance away, near the rick, a woman with a face black from the sun and with arms as veined as a man's was labouring away at the handle of the winnower, as if it were a hurdy-gurdy. Red blades flashed in the round opening of the drum.

The wind carried a shining cloud of chaff out of the winnowing machine. Like light, airy muslin it settled on the ground and on the tall weeds; it floated to the vegetable garden where a scarecrow in a torn cap—it was a nobleman's cap, with a red band—spread its rags over the dry leaves of ripe yellow-red steppe tomatoes.

It was clear that the whole peasant family, with the exception of its head, was at work on this small *garman.* The head of the family, of course, was at the war in Manchuria, and quite likely at that very moment he was crouching in a field of kaoliang while the Japanese were firing shimose at him.

The people here were poor, and their threshing was on a small scale, not at all like the rich, noisy, busy threshing Petya was accustomed to at the other farm. But he found this simple scene fascinating too. He would have liked very much, for one thing, to take a ride on the board with the flints, or, at least, to turn the handle of the winnower. At any other time he surely

would have asked the boy to take him along on the board, but the pity of it was that he had to hurry.

He went back.

Petya was never to forget the simple, touching details of that picture of peasant labour: the glint of the new straw; the neatly whitewashed back wall of the clay hut, and beside it the rag dolls and the little dried gourds called *tarakutski*, the only toys of peasant children; and on the ridge of the reed roof, a stork standing on one leg next to his large and carelessly built nest.

Especially clear was the picture he carried away of the stork, with its tight-fitting little jacket and pique vest, its red walking stick of a leg (the other leg was bent under and not to be seen at all), and the long red beak that made a wooden click, like a night watchman's rattle.

In front of a cottage with a blue notice board reading "Volost Administration", three saddled cavalry horses were hitched to the porch posts.

A soldier in dusty boots, with a sword between his knees, sat on the steps in the shade smoking a cigarette made of coarse tobacco rolled in newspaper.

"I say there, what are you doing here?" Petya asked him.

The soldier lazily surveyed the city boy from head to foot and ejected a long stream of yellow spittle through his teeth. "Hunting down a sailor," he said indifferently.

What kind of mysterious and terrible man is this sailor who is hiding somewhere in the steppe nearby, who sets fire to farms and whom soldiers are hunting? Petya wondered as he walked down the hot, deserted street back to the well. What if that dreadful highwayman attacked coaches?

Naturally, Petya did not mention his fears to Father and Pavlik. Why make them worry? But he himself, naturally, would keep a lookout. And to be on the safe side he shoved his collections farther back under the seat.

As soon as the coach started up the hill he glued his face to the window and anxiously scanned the roadside, expecting to see the highwayman pop out at every turn.

He was firmly resolved to stick to his post all the way to town, come what may.

Meanwhile Father and Pavlik, obviously unaware of the danger, occupied themselves with the cantaloupes.

In a pillow-case of plain linen that was faded from numerous launderings and had a little bouquet of flowers embroidered in each corner, lay ten cantaloupes, bought at a kopeck each. Father took out a firm greyish-green one covered with a close network of lines, and saying, "Well, now we shall try these famous cantaloupes", neatly sliced it lengthwise and opened it like a book. A wonderful fragrance filled the coach.

He cut round the soft insides with his penknife and flipped them out the window. Then he divided the

cantaloupe into thin, appetising slices. "Looks quite toothsome," he remarked as he laid out the slices on a clean handkerchief.

Pavlik, who had been fidgeting impatiently all the while, pounced on the biggest slice with both hands and sank into it up to his ears. He ate with gurgling sounds of delight; cloudy drops of juice hung from his chin.

Father, on the other hand, put a small slice into his mouth, tried it, closed his eyes, and said, "Indeed an excellent cantaloupe."

"Yum-yum," Pavlik confirmed.

Here Petya, behind whose back all these unendurable things had been taking place, could hold out no longer. Forgetting the danger, he threw himself upon the cantaloupe.

5

THE RUNAWAY

About ten miles from Akkerman the vineyards began. The cantaloupe had been eaten long ago and the rind thrown out of the window. The trip was growing tedious. It would soon be midday.

The fresh morning breeze, which had served as a reminder that autumn really was in the offing, had subsided completely. The sun beat down as in the

middle of July; its rays were somehow even hotter, drier, broader.

Sand lay nearly all of two feet deep in the road, and the horses laboured to pull the heavy coach through it. The small front wheels sank in the sand up to the hub. The large rear wheels wobbled along slowly, crunching the blue seashells in the sand.

A choking cloud of dust as fine as flour enveloped the travellers. Their eyebrows and eye-lashes turned grey. The dust gritted between their teeth. Pavlik goggled his mirror-like, light-chocolate eyes and sneezed desperately.

The driver turned into a miller.

All about them the vineyards stretched endlessly.

The earth, dry and grey from dust, was covered with the gnarled plaits of old vines standing in strict chessboard pattern. They looked as if they were twisted by rheumatism. Had not Nature bethought herself to decorate them with those wonderful leaves of antique design they might have looked ugly, repulsive even.

In the rays of the midday sun the leaves, with their jagged edges, their raised patternwork of curving veins and their turquoise spots of copper sulphate, looked like fresh greenery.

The young shoots of the vines wound sharply round the tall stakes, while the old ones were bent under the weight of clusters of grapes.

It took a keen eye, though, to spot the clusters hidden among the leaves. A person without any

experience might pass through several acres without noticing a single one, yet every vine was hung with them, and they cried out, "Why, here we are, you strange creature, bushels and bushels of us, all about you! Pick us and eat, simpleton that you are!" Then, all of a sudden, the simpleton would notice a cluster under his very nose, then another, then a third—until, as if by magic, the entire vineyard glowed with them.

Petya was an expert in these matters. His eye caught the clusters at once. More, he could even tell the different varieties as they drove past. And there were a great many varieties. The large light-green Chaus had cloudy pits visible through their thick skin and hung in long triangular clusters weighing two or three pounds. The experienced eye would never confuse them with, say, the Ladies' Fingers, which were also light-green but longer and shinier. The tender medicinal Shashla might appear to be the twin of the Pink Muscatel, yet what a world of a difference between them! The round Shashla grapes, pressed so tightly together in their graceful little clusters that they lost their shape and almost became cubes, brightly reflected the sun in their honey-pink bubbles. The Pink Muscatels, however, were covered with a dull purplish film and did not reflect the sun.

All of them—the blue-black Isabella, the Chaus, the Shashla and the Muscatel—were so wonderfully ripe and beautiful that even the critical butterflies alighted on them as if they were flowers, and the feelers of the

butterflies intertwined with the green tendrils of the vines.

From time to time a straw hut could be seen among the vines. Beside it, in the lacy blue shade of an apple tree or apricot tree, always stood a tub of copper sulphate.

Petya gazed with longing at those cosy little straw huts.

Well did he know the delight of sitting on the hot dry straw inside such a hut, in the sultry after-dinner shade.

The oppressive, motionless air would be filled with the aroma of savoury and fennel. Pods of chick-peas would be drying with a faint crackle. It was wonderful! What bliss!

The grape-vines would tremble and ripple in the glassy waves of heat.

And over it all would stretch the dusty, pale-blue sky of the steppe, a sky nearly drained of colour by the heat.

How wonderful!

Suddenly something so extraordinary happened, and with such breath-taking swiftness, that it was difficult to say what came first and what after.

At any rate, first a shot rang out. Not the familiar hollow shot from a fowling-piece which you so often heard in vineyards and inspired no fears. No. This was the ominous and terrifying crack of an army rifle.

At that same instant a mounted policeman holding a carbine appeared in the road.

He raised his carbine again and aimed into the depths of the vineyard. But then he changed his mind, lowered the carbine across his saddle, spurred the horse, and, leaning forward, jumped over the roadside ditch and the high embankment right into the vineyard. He slapped down his cap and galloped straight ahead, trampling the vines. Soon he was lost from sight.

The coach continued on its way.

For a time not a soul was to be seen.

All of a sudden there was a stirring in the bushes on the embankment behind them. A figure jumped into the ditch and then clambered out into the road.

Veiled in a thick cloud of dust, the figure raced after the coach.

The driver, on his high seat, was probably the first to notice that figure. But instead of pulling on the brakes he stood up and waved the whip furiously over his head. The horses broke into a gallop.

But the stranger had already jumped on the footboard. He opened the rear door and looked in.

His breath came in painful gasps.

He was a stocky man with a young face pale from fright and brown eyes filled with what seemed either merriment or deadly fear.

A shiny new cap with a button on it, the kind of cap workmen wore on holidays, sat awkwardly on his large, round, close-cropped head. Yet under his tight jacket could be seen an embroidered shirt such as farmhands wore, so that he seemed to be a farm labourer too.

However, his thick trousers of pilot-cloth, which were velvety with dust, were neither a workman's nor a farm labourer's.

One of the trouser-legs had pulled up, showing the rust-coloured top of a rough, double-seamed navy boot.

"The sailor!" The instant this terrifying thought flashed through Petya's mind he clearly saw, to his horror, a blue anchor tattooed on the back of the hand clenched round the door-knob.

The stranger was obviously just as embarrassed by his sudden intrusion as were the passengers themselves.

At sight of the dumbfounded gentleman in pince-nez and the two frightened children, he moved his lips soundlessly; he seemed to be trying to say hello, or else to apologise.

But all that came of his efforts was a twisted, confused smile.

Finally he waved his hand and was about to jump from the footboard to the road, but a mounted detail suddenly appeared ahead. He peered cautiously round the corner of the coach, and when he caught sight of the soldiers in a cloud of dust he quickly jumped inside, slamming the door after him.

He looked at the passengers with pleading eyes. Then, without saying a word, he dropped to all fours. To Petya's horror, he crawled under the seat where the collections were hidden.

Petya looked in despair at Father. But Father sat absolutely motionless; his face was impassive and somewhat pale, and his beard jutted forward determinedly. His hands were folded on his stomach; he was twirling his thumbs.

His entire appearance said: Nothing has happened. You must not ask any questions. You must sit in your places and continue travelling as before.

Petya, and little Pavlik too, understood Father at once. Mum's the word! Under the circumstances that was the simplest and best policy.

As to the driver, he was no problem at all. He was so busy whipping on the horses that he never even glanced back.

In a word, it was a most curious but unanimous conspiracy of silence.

The mounted detail rode up to the coach.

Soldiers' faces looked in at the window. But the sailor was already far back under the seat. He was completely out of sight.

The soldiers obviously found nothing suspicious in that peaceful coach with the children and the egg-plants. They rode on without stopping.

For not less than half an hour after that all were silent. The sailor lay under the seat without stirring. Tranquillity reigned.

Finally a string of little houses amidst green acacia trees came into view ahead. The outskirts of the town.

Father was the first to break the silence. "Well, well, we've almost reached Akkerman," he remarked

as if to himself, yet in a deliberately loud voice, as he stood gazing nonchalantly out the window. "It's already in sight. How frightfully hot it is! And not a soul in the road."

Petya saw through his father's manoeuvre at once. "We're almost there!" he shouted. "We're almost there!"

He took Pavlik by the shoulders and pushed him to the window. "Look, Pavlik," he cried with feigned excitement, "look at that beautiful bird in the sky!"

"Where?" Pavlik asked with curiosity, sticking out his tongue.

"Goodness gracious, what a stupid thing you are! Why, *there* it is."

"I don't see it."

"You must be blind."

At that moment there was a rustle behind them, followed by the banging of the door. Petya quickly turned round. But everything was the same as before—only now there was no boot sticking out from under the seat.

Petya looked in alarm under the seat to see if his collections were safe. They were. Everything was in order.

At the window, Pavlik was still moving his head this way and that, looking for the bird,

"Where's the bird?" he asked querulously, twisting his little mouth. "Show me the bird. Pe-e-et-ya, where's the bird?"

"Stop whining," Petya said in the tone of a grown-up. "The bird's gone. It flew away. Don't bother me."

Pavlik gave a deep sigh: he saw that he had been tricked. He looked under the seat, but to his amazement no one was there.

"Daddy," he said finally, in a shaking voice, "where's the man? Where's he gone to?"

"Stop chattering," Father said sternly.

Pavlik fell into a sad silence, puzzling over the mysterious disappearance of the bird and the no less mysterious disappearance of the man.

The wheels began to clatter over cobblestones. The coach drove into a shady street lined with acacias.

The grey wobbly trunks of telephone poles flashed by, and roofs of red tile and blue-painted iron; for a minute the dull water of the estuary appeared in the distance.

An ice-cream man in a raspberry-coloured shirt walked by in the shade, carrying his tub on his head.

Judging by the sun, it was already past one o'clock. The *Turgenev* was to sail at two.

Father told the driver to go directly to the wharf without stopping at a hotel. At the wharf, the steamer had just let out a very long and deep hoot.

6

THE *TURGENEV*

Even in the early years of this century the *Turgenev* was considered quite out of date.

With her gather long but narrow hull, her two paddle-wheels—their red float-boards could be seen through the slits of the round paddle-box—and her two funnels she looked more like a big launch than a small steamer.

To Petya, however, the *Turgenev* was always one of the miracles of shipbuilding, and the trip between Odessa and Akkerman seemed no less than a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

A second-class ticket cost a goodly sum: one ruble and ten kopeks. Two tickets were bought. Pavlik travelled free.

Still, travelling by steamer was much cheaper, and much pleasanter, besides, than bouncing along in the dust for thirty miles in an Ovidiopol carriage. This was a rattling vehicle with a Jewish driver in a tattered gaberdine belted swaggeringly with a coachman's red girdle; a despondent-looking fellow with red hair and with eyes always pink and ailing, who tested the five-ruble piece with his teeth. He would drag the very heart out of his passengers by stopping every two miles to feed oats to his decrepit nags.

No sooner had they settled themselves in a second-class cabin than Pavlik, worn out by the heat and the drive, became drowsy. He had to be put to bed at once on the black oilcloth bunk; the bunk was burning hot from the sun beating through the rectangular windows.

The windows were framed in highly polished brass, true, but they spoiled the fun all the same.

Everyone knew that a ship was supposed to have round portholes which were screwed down when a storm blew up.

In this respect the third-class quarters in the bow of the ship were much better, for they had real portholes, even though instead of soft bunks there were only plain wooden plank-benches, like in the horse-trams.

Travelling third class, however, was looked upon as "improper", in just the same degree as travelling first class was "exorbitant".

By social standing, it was to the middle category of passengers, to the second class, that the family of the Odessa schoolmaster Batchei belonged. That was as pleasant and convenient in some cases as it was inconvenient and humiliating in others. It all depended upon which class their acquaintances were travelling in.

For that reason Mr. Batchei, so as to avoid unnecessary indignities, made it a point never to depart from the summer resort in the company of wealthy neighbours.

The tomato and grape season was then at its height. The loading went on and on tediously.

Several times Petya stepped out on deck to see whether they would ever be ready to cast off. Each time it seemed to him that no progress was being made. The stevedores were following one another up the gangway in an endless file, carrying crates and baskets on their shoulders, and still the cargo on the wharf did not diminish.

The boy walked over to the mate, who was in charge of the loading, and hovered about beside him. He went to the hatchway and looked down it to see how wine barrels were carefully lowered into the hold on chains, three or four at a time, tied together.

Every now and then he went so far as to brush his elbow against the mate. "Accidentally on purpose", to attract attention to himself.

"Don't get in the way, my lad," the mate said, annoyed but indifferent.

Petya took no offence. The main thing was to strike up a conversation by hook or by crook.

"I say there, tell me please, are we starting soon?"

"We are."

"How soon?"

"As soon as we're loaded we'll start."

"But when will we be loaded?"

"When we start."

Petya gave a loud laugh, to flatter the mate.

"But tell me really—*when?"*

"Get out of the way, I said!"

Petya walked off with a lively, independent air, as though no unpleasantness had occurred between them; it was simply that they had chatted and then parted.

He rested his chin on the rail and again looked at the wharf. Now he was bored to death by it.

Besides the *Turgenev, a* great many barges were being loaded.

The whole wharf was crowded with wagons of wheat.

The wheat made a dry, silken rustle as it flowed down the wooden chutes into the square hatchways of the holds.

A fierce white sun reigned with merciless monotony over that dusty square which had not the slightest trace of beauty or poetry.

Everything, absolutely everything, seemed dreary and ugly.

Those wonderful tomatoes which had such a warm and delicious gleam in the shade of wilted leaves in the vegetable gardens now lay packed in thousands of crates all alike.

Those tender-tender grapes, each cluster of which, in the vineyard, seemed a work of art, had been squeezed greedily into coarse willow baskets and hastily sewn round with sacking; and on each basket there was a label besmeared with paste.

The wheat that had been grown and harvested with such labour—the large amber wheat fragrant with all the odours of the hot fields—lay there on a dirty tarpaulin, and men in boots walked over it.

Among the sacks, crates and barrels strode an Akkerman policeman in a white uniform jacket, with an orange revolver-cord round his sunburned neck and a long sword at his side.

The motionless river heat, the dust, and the sluggish but never-ending noise of the tedious loading made Petya sleepy.

On an off-chance, he went up to the mate again to find out if they would start soon, and again he received

the answer that when they were loaded they would start, and they would be loaded when they started.

Yawning, and reflecting sleepily that everything in the world was obviously merchandise—the tomatoes were merchandise, the barges were merchandise, the houses on the earthen shore were merchandise, the lemon-yellow ricks next to those houses were merchandise, and quite likely the stevedores were merchandise too—Petya staggered to the cabin and lay down beside Pavlik. He fell asleep before he knew it, and when he woke up he found they were already moving.

The cabin had in some strange way changed its position. It had become much lighter. Across the ceiling ran a mirror-like reflection of rippling water.

The engine was working. The busy flutter of the paddle-wheels could be heard.

Petya had missed the most thrilling moment of the departure—missed the third blast of the siren, the captain's command, the raising of the gangway, the casting-off. . . .

What made it all the more horrible was that neither Father nor Pavlik was in the cabin. That meant they had seen it all.

"Why didn't you wake me?" Petya cried out. He felt as if he had been robbed in his sleep.

As he rushed out of the cabin to the deck he gave his leg a frightful bang against the sharp brass threshold. But he paid no attention to such a trifle.

"Drat them! Drat them!"

Petya need not have been so excited, however.

The boat had indeed cast off, but it had not yet set a straight course; it was only turning about. That meant the most interesting events were still to come.

There would be "slow ahead", and "dead slow ahead", and "stop", and "go astern", and "dead astern", and a host of other fascinating things which the boy knew to perfection.

The wharf moved back, grew smaller, circled about.

The boat was suddenly full of passengers, all crowding together at the same side. They were still waving their handkerchiefs and hats, with as much frenzy as if they were bound for the end of the world, while as a matter of fact they were travelling a distance of exactly thirty miles as the crow flies.

But such were the traditions of sea travel, and such the hot temperament of Southerners.

Most of them were third-class passengers and deck passengers from the lower foredeck, near the hold. They were not allowed on the upper deck, which was reserved exclusively for the "clean" public of the first and second classes.

Petya caught sight of Father and Pavlik on the top deck. They were waving their hats excitedly.

Also on deck were the captain and the entire crew — the mate and two barefoot deck-hands. The only members of the whole crew who were doing anything really nautical were the captain and one of the hands. The mate and the other hand were selling tickets. With their coloured little paper rolls and a green wire cash-

box of the kind usually seen in bakeries, they were making the round of the passengers who had not had time to buy tickets on shore.

The captain gave his commands striding back and forth across the deck between the bridges on either side. Meanwhile, right before the admiring eyes of the passengers,

the deck-hand looked into the big brass pot of a compass and turned the steering-wheel, helping it along now and then with his bare foot. The steering-wheel creaked incredibly and the rudder chains clanged as they crept backwards and forwards along the side, ready at any moment to tear away the trains of careless ladies.

The boat was backing and slowly turning.

"Starboard helm!" cried the captain to the helmsman. He had the hoarse, mustardy voice of a glutton and a bully. He paid not the slightest attention to the passengers who had gathered in a deferential knot at the compass. "Starboard helm! More! A little more! Another trifle more! Good! Steady!"

The captain went across to the starboard bridge, opened the speaking tube, and pressed the pedal. In the depths of the boat a bell ting-a-linged. The passengers lifted their eyebrows respectfully and exchanged silent glances. They understood: the captain had just signalled to the engine-room.

What should he do? Run to the bridge to watch the captain call down into the speaking tube, or remain

near the helmsman and the compass? Petya was ready to tear himself in two.

The speaking tube won.

He seized Pavlik by the hand and dragged him to the bridge. "Look, Pavlik, look!" he shouted excitedly, not without the secret hope of astonishing two pretty little girls by his knowledge of things nautical. "He's going to say 'Go ahead' into the speaking tube."

"Slow astern!" said the captain into the speaking tube.

Down below, the bell immediately ting-a-linged. That meant the command had been heard.

7

THE PHOTOGRAPH

Akkerman had disappeared from sight, and so had the ruins of the old Turkish fortress, yet the steamer was still running down the enormously broad estuary of the Dniester. There seemed no end to the ugly, coffee-coloured river, over which the sun had poured a leaden film.

The water was so muddy that the boat's shadow seemed to be lying on clay.

The passengers felt as though the trip had not yet really begun. They were all sick of the estuary and were waiting for the sea.

Finally, after about an hour and a half, the steamer neared the mouth of the estuary.

Petya glued himself to the rail; he did not want to miss even the slightest detail of the great moment. The water became noticeably lighter, although it still was fairly muddy.

The waves now were broader and higher. The buoys marking the channel jutted out of the water like red sticks, and their pointed mushroom caps rocked unsteadily to and fro.

At times a buoy floated so close to the ship's side that Petya could clearly see the iron cage in the centre of the mushroom where a lantern was placed at night.

The *Turgenev* overtook several black fishing boats and two small boats with taut dark sails.

The boats, lifted and then dropped by the steamer's wave, began to rock.

Off the hot sandy Cape of Karolino-Bugaz, with its border-post barracks and mast, a broad fairway marked by two lines of buoys led out into the open sea.

Now the captain himself looked at the compass every minute or so and indicated the course to the helmsman.

This was clearly no trifling matter.

The water became still lighter. Now it was obviously diluted by the pure blue of the sea.

"Half-speed!" the captain called into the speaking tube.

Ahead of them, sharply divided from the yellow estuary, lay the shaggy blue-black sea.

"Slow!"

From the sea came a fresh wind.

"Dead slow!"

The engine almost stopped breathing. The float-boards barely slapped the water. The flat shore stretched so near that wading across to it seemed the easiest thing in the world.

The small, dazzling white lighthouse at the border post; the high mast with its gay garlands of naval flags stiffened by the wind; the gunboat sitting low among the reeds; the small figures of the border guards washing their linen in the crystal shallow water—all

these moved noiselessly past the ship, their sunlit details as clear and distinct as transfer pictures.

The nearness of the sea made the world clean and fresh again, as if all the dust had suddenly been blown away from the ship and her passengers.

A change came over the crates and baskets, too. What had been insufferably dull merchandise gradually turned into cargo, and as the ship approached the sea it began to creak, as real cargo should.

"Half-speed!"

The border post lay astern; it shifted about and drifted into the distance. The ship was surrounded by deep water, clear and dark-green. The moment she entered it she started to roll; the wind whipped spray on the deck.

"Full speed!"

Murky clouds of soot poured out of the hoarsely spluttering funnels. A slanting shadow settled across the awning at the stern.

Apparently that old lady, the engine, was not finding it so easy to battle the strong waves of the open sea. She began to breathe hard.

The ancient plating creaked rhythmically. The anchor under the bowsprit bowed to the waves.

The wind had already managed to carry off a straw hat; it floated away, rocking in the broad foamy wake.

Four blind Jews in blue spectacles climbed the ladder to the upper deck in single file, holding down their bowler hats.

They seated themselves on a bench and then went at it with their fiddles.

"The Hills of Manchuria" march, played in a sickeningly false key, mingled with the heavy sighs of the engine.

Up the same ladder ran one of the ship's two stewards, the tails of his dress coat waving in the wind; he wore white cotton gloves that were comparatively clean. As he ran he bore along, with the skill of a juggler, a tray with a fizzing bottle of lemonade.

That was how they entered the sea.

Petya had already inspected the whole ship. He had discovered that there were no suitable children aboard, hardly anyone with whom a pleasant acquaintance might be struck up.

At first, true, the two girls for whom he so unsuccessfully showed off his nautical knowledge had looked promising.

But not for long.

To begin with, the girls were travelling first class, and by speaking French with their governess they gave him to understand right off that they had nothing in common with a boy from the second class.

Then, the minute they reached the sea one of the girls became sea-sick; and—as Petya had seen through the open door—she now lay on a velvet divan in the unattainable splendour of a first-class cabin; moreover, she lay there sucking a lemon, which was downright disgusting.

And lastly, though she was undoubtedly beautiful and elegantly turned-out (she wore a short coat with golden buttons decorated with anchors, and a sailor hat with a red pompon, French style), the girl who remained on deck turned out to be singularly capricious, and a cry-baby. She quarrelled endlessly with her father, a tall, extremely phlegmatic gentleman with side-whiskers, who wore a flowing cape. He was the very image of Lord Glenarvan from *Captain Grant's Children.*

Father and daughter were carrying on the following conversation:

"I'm thirsty, Daddy."

"Never mind, you'll get over it," Lord Glenarvan replied phlegmatically, without taking his eyes from his binoculars.

The girl stamped her foot. "I'm thirsty," she repeated, raising her voice.

"Never mind, you'll get over it," her father replied, calmer than ever.

The girl chanted with stubborn fury, "Daddy, I'm thirsty. Daddy, I'm thirsty. Daddy, I'm thirsty."

Bubbles frothed on her angry lips. In a nagging drawl that would have tried the patience of an angel, she continued, "Da-aad-dy, I'm thir-ir-ir-sty. I'm thir-ir-ir-sty."

To which Lord Glenarvan leisurely replied, with even greater indifference and without raising his voice, "Never mind, you'll get over it."

This strange duel between the two obstinate creatures had been going on practically all the way since Akkerman.

Naturally, striking up an acquaintance with her was quite out of the question.

Then Petya found a fascinating occupation: he followed in the footsteps of one of the passengers. Everywhere the passenger went, Petya went too.

That was really interesting, especially since Petya had long noticed something strange about the passenger's behaviour.

Other passengers, perhaps, had not noticed one astonishing circumstance, but Petya had, and he was greatly struck by it.

This man did not have a ticket, and the mate was very well aware of it.

But for some reason he had said nothing to the strange passenger. More, he had given him permission —not in so many words, of course—to go wherever he wished, even into the first-class cabins.

Petya clearly saw what had passed when the mate approached the strange passenger with his wire cash-box.

"Your ticket?"

The passenger whispered something in the mate's ear. The mate nodded. "Right you are."

After that, no one disturbed the strange passenger. He walked about the whole ship, looking into every corner: into the cabins, the engine-room, the refreshment bar, the lavatory, the hold.

Now who could he be?

A landowner? No. Landowners did not dress that way and did not act that way.

A Bessarabian landowner always wore a heavy linen dust coat and a white travelling cap, and the visor of the cap was covered with finger marks. Next, he would have a drooping corn-coloured moustache, and a small wicker basket with a padlock on it. In the basket there were always a box of smoked mackerel, some tomatoes and some Brinza cheese, and two or three quarts of new white wine in a green bottle.

Landowners travelled second class, for economy's sake; they kept together, never came out of their cabins, and were always either eating or playing cards.

Petya had not seen the strange passenger in their company.

He wore a summer cap, true enough, but he had neither a dust coat nor a wicker basket.

No, decidedly, he was not a landowner.

Then perhaps he was a postal official, or a schoolmaster?

Hardly.

Although under his jacket he did wear a pongee shirt with a turned-down collar, and instead of a tie a cord with little pompons, his curled-up moustache which was as black as boot-polish and his smooth-shaven chin obviously did not fit in with that.

And as for the smoked pince-nez—uncommonly large ones they were—on the coarse fleshy nose with hairy nostrils, they did not fit any category of passenger whatsoever.

Besides, there were those pinstripe trousers and those sandals over thick white socks.

Yes, something was definitely fishy here.

Petya shoved his hands in his pockets (which, by the way, was strictly forbidden) and strolled along with a most independent air, following the strange passenger all over the ship.

At first the passenger stood for a while in the narrow passage-way between the engine-room and the galley.

The galley gave off the sour, smoky reek of an eating-house, and from the open ventilators of the engine-room there came a hot wind smelling of superheated steam, iron, boiling water and oil.

The engine-room skylight was raised, and Petya could look down into it—which he did with delight.

He knew the engine from A to Z, yet he went into raptures each time he saw it. He could stand there watching it for hours.

As everybody knew, the engine was outdated and good for nothing and so on, but it was incredibly powerful and astonishing all the same.

The steel connecting rods covered with thick green grease slid back and forth with amazing ease, considering they weighed a ton.

The pistons pumped furiously. The cast-iron cranks twirled. The brass discs of the cams rubbed quickly and nervously against one another, exerting a mysterious influence on the painstaking work of the modest but important slide valves.

And over all this swirling chaos reigned an immensely huge flywheel. At first glance it seemed to be turning slowly, but when one took a closer look one saw that it was going at a tremendous speed and was raising a steady hot wind.

It was nerve-racking to watch the mechanic as he walked about among those inexorably moving joints and bent over to apply the long nozzle of his oil can to them.

But the most amazing thing in the whole engine-room was the ship's one and only electric lamp.

It hung in a wire muzzle, under a tin plate. (And what a far cry it was from the blindingly bright electric lamps of today!)

Inside its blackened glass there was a dimly glowing red-hot little loop of wire which quivered at every vibration of the ship.

But it seemed a miracle. It was associated with the magic word "Edison", which in the boy's mind had long since lost meaning as a surname and had taken on mysterious meaning as a phenomenon of Nature, like "magnetism", or "electricity".

After that the strange man walked unhurriedly round the lower decks.

Petya had the impression he was making a secret but very attentive study of the passengers who were sitting on their bundles and baskets at the mast, near the rails, and beside the cargo.

He was ready to bet (betting, by the way, was also strictly forbidden) that the man was secretly searching for someone.

The stranger stepped unceremoniously over sleeping Moldavians. He squeezed his way through groups of Jews who were eating olives. He cautiously raised the edges of a tarpaulin stretched over some crates of tomatoes.

Asleep on the bare boards of the deck lay a man with his cap over his cheek and his head nestling in one of the rope fenders which are lowered over the side to soften the ship's impact against the wharf. His arms were spread out and his legs were drawn up, just as a child sleeps.

Petya gave a casual glance at the man's legs and then stood petrified: the trousers had pulled up, and he saw the well-remembered navy boots with the rust-coloured tops.

There could be no doubt about it. They were the very same boots he had seen under the seat in the coach that morning.

And even if that was a mere coincidence, there was something else that most certainly was not. On the sleeping man's hand, in the very same place—the fleshy triangle beneath the thumb and forefinger—Petya clearly saw a small blue anchor.

He almost cried out in surprise.

He controlled himself because he noticed that the sleeping man had attracted the attention of the moustached passenger too.

Moustaches walked past the sleeper several times, trying to peer under the cap covering his face. But he did not succeed. Then he walked by once again and stepped on the sleeping man's hand, as if by accident.

"Sorry!"

The other gave a start. He sat up and looked round in fright with sleepy, uncomprehending eyes.

"Eh? What's up? Where to?" he muttered disjointedly as he rubbed the coral imprint of the rope on his cheek.

It was he, the very same sailor!

Petya hid behind the hatchway and watched with bated breath to see what would happen next.

But nothing special happened. After excusing himself again, Moustaches went on his way, and the sailor turned over on his other side. He did not go back to sleep, however, but kept looking round in alarm and —so it seemed to Petya—impatient annoyance.

What should he do? Run to Father? Or tell the whole story to the mate?

No, no!

Petya clearly remembered Father's behaviour in the coach. Evidently the whole business was something about which he should neither speak to anybody nor ask any questions, but simply hold his tongue and make believe he knew nothing.

At this point he decided to hunt up Moustaches and see what he was doing.

He found him on the first-class deck, which was practically deserted. He was leaning against a life-boat with a canvas tightly roped over it.

Under the deck-house the invisible wheel was pounding away at water almost black and covered with a coarse lace of foam. It was making the kind of noise you heard at a watermill. The ship's shadow, now a rather long one, slid quickly over the bright waves, which turned a darker and darker blue the farther away they were.

At the stern waved the white, blue and red merchant navy flag, shot through by the sun.

Behind her the ship left a broad wake; it widened and melted and stretched far into the distance, like a well-swept sleigh road at Shrovetide.

On the left ran the high clay shore of Novorossia.

As for Moustaches, he was furtively examining something he held in his hand.

Petya stole up to him from behind, stood on tiptoe, and saw it. It was a small, passport-size photograph of a sailor in full uniform; his cap was tilted at a swaggerish angle, and on its band was the inscription:

KNYAZ POTEMKIN TAVRICHESKY

That was the very same sailor, the one with the anchor on his hand.

And here Petya suddenly realised, in a flash of insight, what was strange about Moustaches' appearance: like the man with the anchor, Moustaches was *in disguise.*

8

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

A fair wind was blowing. To help the engine along and to make up for the time lost during loading, the captain ordered a sail to be set.

Not a single holiday celebration, not a single present, could have thrown Petya into such raptures as did that trifle.

On second thought, a fine trifle!

An engine and a sail at one and the same time on one and the same ship! A packet-boat and frigate combined!

I dare say that you, comrades, would also be delighted if you suddenly had the good fortune to make a sea voyage on a real steamer that was under sail into the bargain.

Even in those days sails were set only on the oldest steamers, and on the rarest occasions at that. Nowadays it is never done at all.

So you can easily imagine how Petya felt about it.

Naturally, Moustaches and the runaway flew out of his mind at once. He stood in the bow, gazing in a

trance at the barefoot deck-hand who was pulling, rather lazily, a neatly folded sail out of the hatchway.

Petya knew perfectly well that this was a jib. All the same he went up to the mate, who, because there were no other seamen, was helping to set the sail.

"I say there, tell me please, is that a jib?"

"It is."

The mate's tone was decidedly gruff, but Petya was not the least offended. He knew very well that a real sea dog was bound to be somewhat gruff. Otherwise what kind of sea-faring man was he?

Petya looked at the passengers with a restrained superior smile and again addressed the mate, casually, as man to man: "Now tell me, please, what other kinds of sails are there? How about the mainsail and foresail?"

"Get out of the way," the mate said, with the expression of a man whose tooth has suddenly begun to ache. "Run along to your Mama in the cabin."

"My Mama's dead," Petya told the rude fellow with sad pride. "We're travelling with Father."

To that the mate made no reply, and the conversation ended.

Finally the jib was set.

The little ship ploughed on faster than ever. Odessa was now tangibly near. The white spit of the Sukhoi Liman came into sight ahead.

The shallow water of this estuary was such a dense and dark blue that it gave off a reddish glow.

Then the slate roofs of Lustdorf, the German quarter, and the tall rough-hewn church with the weather-vane on its spire appeared.

And after that came the villas, orchards, vegetable gardens, bathing beaches, towers, lighthouses.

First there was the famous Kovalevsky tower, a tower with a legend.

A rich man by the name of Kovalevsky decided to build, at his own risk, a water-supply system for the city. It would have brought him vast profit. For every drink of water they took, people would have to pay Mr. Kovalevsky as much as he wanted. You see, the only source of good drinking water near Odessa was on Mr.Kovalevsky's land. But the water lay very deep, and to get it a tremendous water tower had to be built. That was a big job for • a single man to handle. But since Mr. Kovalevsky did not want to share his future profits with anyone, he began to build the tower on his own. The work turned out to cost much more than he had thought it would. His relatives pleaded with him to give up his mad idea, but he had already put so much money into it that he would not back out. He went on with the work. When the tower was three-quarters built he ran out of money. But by mortgaging all his houses and his lands, he managed to finish the tower. It was a huge thing, and it looked like a chessboard castle enlarged thousands of times. On Sundays whole families used to come from Odessa to look at the wonder. But the tower alone was not enough, of course. Machines had to be ordered from abroad; holes

had to be drilled, mains had to be laid. Mr. Kovalevsky grew desperate. He ran to the merchants and bankers of Odessa for a loan. He offered a fabulous rate of interest. He promised them dividends such as they had never dreamed of. He begged, he went down on his knees, he wept. But the rich merchants and bankers would not forgive him for having refused to take them in as partners from the beginning. They were deaf to his pleas. Not a kopek did he get from anybody. He was completely ruined, broken, crushed. The water-main became an obsession with him. All day long he used to pace, like a madman, round and round the tower which had swallowed his whole fortune, racking his brains for a way to raise money. Little by little he went out of his mind. One fine day he climbed to the very top of the accursed tower and jumped down. That had happened about fifty years earlier, but the tower, blackened with age, still stood overlooking the sea not far from the rich commercial city, as a grim warning and a ghastly monument to insatiable human greed.

Then the new white lighthouse appeared, and after it the old one, now no longer in service.

Lit up by the pink sun setting into the golden chain of suburban acacias, they looked so distinct, so near—and, above all, so familiar—as they towered over the bluffs, that Petya was ready to blow into the jib as hard as he could, if only that would make the ship arrive sooner.

From here on he knew every inch of the coast. Bolshoi Fontan, Sredny Fontan, Maly Fontan, the high,

steep shore overgrown with scratch weed, wild rose, lilac, and hawthorn.

The big rocks standing in the water in the shadow of the bluffs, rocks green with slime halfway up their sides, and on them the swimmers and the anglers with their bamboo poles.

And here was Arcadia, the restaurant on piles, with its band-stand—from a distance so small, no bigger than a prompter's box—its brightly-coloured sunshades, and the table-cloths across which the cool wind was scurrying. Each new detail which met the boy's eyes was fresher and more interesting than the one before. They had not been forgotten. No! They could be forgotten no more than he could forget his own name! They had somehow merely slipped from his memory for a time. Now they were suddenly rushing back, the way a boy rushes home after having gone out without permission.

They came racing back, more and more of them all the time, one overtaking the other.

They seemed to be shouting to him, in eager rivalry:

"Greetings, Petya! So you're back at last! How we've missed you! Come now, don't you recognise us? Take a good look: this is me, your favourite summer resort, Marazli. How you loved to walk over my splendidly clipped emerald lawns, strictly forbidden though that was! How you loved to examine my marble statues, over which big snails with four little horns—'lavriks-pavliks', you called them—used to crawl, leaving behind a slimy trail! Look how I've

grown during the summer! Look how thick my chestnut trees have become! What gorgeous dahlias and peonies are in bloom in my flower-beds! What magnificent August butterflies you'll see alighting in the dark shadows of my garden walks!"

"And here am I, Otrada! Surely you haven't forgotten my bathing beach, my shooting gallery, my skittle-alley! Look at me: while you were gone we put up a wonderful merry-go-round, with boats and horses. And a stone's throw away lives your old friend Gavrik. He's counting the hours until your return. So hurry, hurry!'"

"I'm here too, Petya! How do you do? Don't you recognise Langeron? Look at all the flat-bottomed fishing boats pulled up on my beach, and at all the fishing nets drying on crossed oars! Wasn't it here, in my sand, that last year you found two kopeks and then drank four whole glasses—it was so much you actually had to force it down —of sour *kvass,* and it tickled your nose and nipped your tongue? Don't you recognise the *kvass* stand? Why, here it is at the edge of the bluff, as large as life, amidst the weeds that have grown so high during the summer! You don't even need binoculars to see it!"

"And here am I! I'm here too! Hello, Petya! Ah, if you only knew what's been going on here in Odessa while you were away! Hello! Hello!"

As they approached the city the wind grew quieter and warmer.

Now the sun had disappeared altogether. Only the top of the mast and the tiny red peak of the weather-vane still glowed in the absolutely clear pink sky.

The jib was taken in.

The pounding of the ship's engine raised a loud echo among the bluffs and crags of the shore. Up the mast crept the pale-yellow top lantern.

In thought Petya was already ashore, in Odessa.

Had anybody told him that only a short while before, that very morning, in fact, he had almost cried when bidding farewell to the farm, he never would have believed it.

The farm? Which farm? He had already forgotten it. It had ceased to exist for him—until the next summer.

Quick, quick! To the cabin, to hurry Daddy and to put their things together!

Petya spun about, ready to run. But then he froze in horror. The sailor with the anchor on his hand was sitting on the steps of the bow-ladder, and Moustaches was walking directly towards him, hands in pockets, without his pince-nez, his sandals squeaking.

He came up to the sailor, leaned over him, and said, in a voice neither loud nor soft, "Zhukov?"

"What about Zhukov?" the sailor said in a low, strained voice. He turned visibly pale and stood up.

"Sit down. Be quiet. Sit down, I tell you."

The sailor continued to stand. A faint smile trembled on his ashen lips.

Moustaches frowned. "From the *Potemkin?* How do you do, my dear chap. You might at least have

changed your boots. And us waiting for you all this long time. Well, what have you to say for yourself, Rodion Zhukov? The game's up, eh?"

With these words Moustaches gripped the sailor by the sleeve.

The sailor's face contorted.

"Hands off!" he cried in a terrible voice. He shifted his weight and slammed his fist into Moustaches' chest with all his might. "Keep your hands off a sick man!"

The sleeve ripped.

"Stop!"

But it was too late.

The sailor had torn himself free and was running down the deck, weaving in and out among the baskets, crates, and passengers. Moustaches ran after him.

An onlooker might have thought these two grown men were playing tag.

They dived, one after the other, into the passage-way next to the engine-room and then bobbed up on the other side. They ran up the ladder, their soles drumming and sliding on the slippery brass steps.

"Stop! Grab him!" cried Moustaches, wheezing heavily.

The sailor now carried a batten which he had torn loose somewhere on the way.

"Grab him! Grab him!"

The passengers, frightened and curious, gathered in a cluster on the deck. There was a piercing blast from a policeman's whistle.

The sailor cleared a high hatchway in one leap. He dodged Moustaches, who had run round the hatchway, jumped back over it, and then hopped on a bench. From the bench he sprang to the rail, grasped the ensign staff, and struck Moustaches across the face with the batten as hard as he could. Then he jumped into the sea.

Spray showered up over the stern.

"Oh!"

The passengers, every single one of them, reeled back as if a gust of wind had caught them.

Moustaches ran back and forth in front of the rail. "Catch him! He'll get away!" he cried hoarsely, holding his hands to his face. "Catch him! He'll get away!"

The mate ran up the ladder three steps at a time with a life-belt.

"Man overboard!"

The passengers reeled forward towards the rail, as if now a gust of wind had caught them from behind.

Petya squeezed through to the rail. Amid the whipped egg-white of the foam, the sailor's head bobbed up and down with the waves like a float. He was already a good way off, and he was swimming.

Not towards the ship, but away from it, working his arms and legs as fast as he could. After every three or four strokes he turned back a tense, angry face.

The mate saw that the man who was overboard had not the slightest desire to be "saved". On the contrary, he was plainly trying to put as much distance as possible between himself and his saviours. Besides, he

was an excellent swimmer and the shore was relatively near.

And so, everything was in order.

There was no cause for worry.

In vain did Moustaches tug at the mate's sleeve, make fierce eyes, and demand that the ship be stopped and a boat lowered.

"He's a political criminal. You'll answer for this!"

The mate shrugged his shoulders phlegmatically. "It's none of my business. I have no orders. Speak to the captain."

The captain merely waved his hand. "We're late as it is. It's out of the question, my good man. Why should we? We'll be mooring in half an hour and then you can go and catch your political chappie. This steamship line is a private company. It doesn't go in for politics, and we have no instructions on that score."

Swearing under his breath, Moustaches, his face battered, headed for the place where the gangway would be set, forcing his way through the crowd of third-class passengers preparing to disembark.

He roughly pushed aside the frightened people; he stepped on their feet and kicked their baskets, and finally reached the rail so as to get off first, the moment the ship moored.

By now the sailor's head could barely be seen in the waves amid the markers swaying above the fishing nets.

9

ODESSA BY NIGHT

The shore darkened quickly; it turned a light blue, then a deep blue, then purple. On land, evening had already come. At sea it was still light. The glossy swell reflected a clear sky. But here, too, evening was making itself felt.

The signal lanterns on the paddle-boxes had been lit without the boy's noticing it, and their bulging glass sides, in the daytime so dark and thick one could never guess their colour, now gleamed green and red; they did not throw any light as yet, but they definitely glowed.

All at once the dark-blue city, with its cupola-shaped theatre roof and the colonnade of the Vorontsov Palace, loomed in front of them, shutting out half the horizon.

The watery stars of the wharf lamps were palely reflected in the light-coloured, absolutely motionless lake of the harbour. It was into the harbour that the *Turgenev* now turned, closely skirting the thick tower of the lighthouse—really not a very big one at all—which had a bell and a ladder.

Down in the engine-room the captain's bell ting-a-linged for the last time.

"Slow!"

The narrow little steamer slid quickly and noiselessly past the three-storey bows of the ocean-

going ships of the Dobrovolny Merchant Line standing in a row inside the breakwater. Petya had to crane his neck in order to study their monstrous anchors.

Those were ships!

"Stop!"

Without slowing down, carried along by her momentum, the *Turgenev* cut obliquely across the harbour, in complete silence; she bore down on the wharf as if she would crash into it any minute.

Two long creases stretched back from her sharp bow, making stripes like a mackerel's in the water.

Along the sides the water gurgled softly.

Heat poured from the advancing city as from an oven.

All of a sudden Petya saw a funnel and two masts sticking out of the mirror-like surface. They floated by as close to the ship's side as could be—black, frightful, dead.

The passengers crowding at the rail gave a gasp.

"They scuttled her," someone said in a low voice.

"Who?" the boy wanted to ask, horror-struck. But just then he saw an even more gruesome sight: the charred iron skeleton of a ship leaning against a charred wharf.

"They burned her," the same voice said, more softly than before.

Now the wharf was upon them.

"Astern!"

The paddle-wheels began to clatter again, revolving in the opposite direction. Little whirlpools scurried across the water.

The wharf drifted away and somehow shifted about, and then, very slowly, it approached again, but from the other side.

Over the heads of the passengers shot a coiled rope, unwinding as it flew.

Petya felt a slight jolt; it had been softened by the rope fender.

The gangway was shoved up from the wharf. The first to run down it was Moustaches. He immediately disappeared in the crowd.

Our travellers waited their turn, and before long they were slowly walking down the gangway to the wharf.

Petya was surprised to see a policeman and several civilians standing at the foot of the gangway. They were looking closely, very closely, at everyone coming down. They looked at Father, who thrust forward a quivering beard and mechanically buttoned his coat. He tightened his grip on Pavlik's hand, and his face took on exactly the same unpleasant expression as it had in the coach that morning when he was talking to the soldier.

They took a cab. Pavlik was put on the folding seat in front, while Petya sat next to Father on the main seat, quite like a grown-up.

As they drove out they saw a sentry with a rifle and with cartridge-pouches at his belt standing by the gate. That was something altogether new.

"Why is a sentry standing there, Daddy?" Petya asked in a whisper.

"For God's sake!" Father said irritably, with a jerk of his neck. "All you do is ask questions. How should I know? If he's standing there it means he's standing there. And you're to sit quiet."

Petya saw that no questions were to be asked, and also that there was no call to take offence at Father's irritability.

But when, at the railway crossing, he saw the trestle bridge burned to the ground, the mounds of charred sleepers, the twisted rails hanging in the air, and the wheels of overturned railway carriages—when he saw that scene of frozen chaos he cried out breathlessly, "Oh, what's that? Look! I say there, cabby, what's that?"

"Set fire to it, they did," the cab-driver said mysteriously, shaking his head in the firm beaver-cloth hat, but whether in condemnation or approval was not clear.

They drove past the famous Odessa Stairway.

Up at the top of its triangle, in the space between the silhouettes of the two semi-circular symmetrical palaces, the small figure of the Due de Richelieu stood outlined against the light evening sky, his arm stretched out in antique mode towards the sea.

The three-armed street lamps along the boulevard gleamed. From the terrace of an open-air restaurant came the strains of music. The first pale star trembled in the sky over the chestnut trees and the gravel of the boulevard.

Somewhere up above, Petya knew, beyond the Nikolayev Boulevard, lay the bright, noisy, luring, unapproachable, intangible place which was referred to in the Batchei family circle with contemptuous respect as "the Centre".

In the Centre lived "the rich", those special beings who travelled first class, who could go to the theatre every day, who for some strange reason had their dinner at seven o'clock in the evening, who kept a *chef* instead of a cook and a *bonne* instead of a nursemaid, and often even "kept their own horses"—something indeed beyond human imagination.

The Batcheis, of course, did not live in "the Centre".

The droshky rumbled over the cobblestones of Karantinnaya Street and then, turning right, drove up the hill to the city proper.

Petya was unaccustomed to the city after his summer's absence.

He was deafened by the clang of horseshoes, which drew sparks from the cobbles, by the clatter of wheels, by the jangle of the horse-trams, by the squeaking of shoes and the firm tapping of walking sticks on the dark-blue slabs of the pavement.

The crisp sadness of autumn's tints had long ago gilded the farm, the harvested fields, the wide-open steppe. But here, in the city, summer still reigned, rich and luxuriant.

The languid heat of evening hung in the breathless air of the acacia-lined streets.

Through the open doors of grocers' shops Petya could see the little yellow tongues of oil lamps throwing their light on jars of coloured sugar-plums.

Right on the pavement, under the acacias, lay mountains of water-melons—glossy greenish-black Tumans with waxy bald spots, and long bright Monasteries with striped sides.

Every now and then there appeared the gleaming vision of a corner fruit shop. In the dazzling glare of the new incandescent lamps, a Persian could be seen fanning magnificent Crimean fruit with rustling plumes of tissue-paper. There were large purple plums covered with a turquoise bloom, and those very expensive luscious brown Beurre Alexander pears.

They drove past mansions, and, through the ironwork fences entwined with wild vines, Petya could see, in the light pouring from the windows, beds of luxurious dahlias, begonias and nasturtiums, with plump moths fluttering above them.

From the railway station came the whistle of steam-engines.

Then they passed the familiar chemist's shop.

Behind the large plate-glass window with its gilded glass letters gleamed two crystal pears, one full of a

bright violet liquid and the other a green liquid. Petya was convinced they were poison. It was from this chemist's the horrible oxygen pillows had been brought to Mummy when she was dying. What a frightful snoring sound they had made near Mummy's medicine-blackened lips!

Pavlik was fast asleep. Father took him in his arms. Pavlik's head swayed and bobbed up and down. His heavy little bare legs kept slipping off Father's lap. But his fingers tightly gripped the bag with the treasured moneybox.

In that state he was handed over into the arms of Dunya, the cook, who was waiting in the street for her masters when the cab finally pulled up at the gate with the triangular little lantern in which the house number glowed dimly.

"Welcome home! Welcome home!"

Petya, still feeling the roll of the deck under his feet, ran into the entrance-way.

What a huge, deserted staircase!

Bright and echoing. How many lamps! At every landing a paraffin lamp in a cast-iron fixture, and over each lamp a little hood swaying lazily in a circle of light.

Brightly polished brass plates on the doors. Coconut fibre doormats. A pram.

Petya had completely forgotten these things, and they now appeared before his wondering eyes in all their original novelty.

He would have to get used to them again.

From somewhere above there came the sharp resounding click of a key, followed by the slamming of a door and then by quick voices. Each exclamation rang out like a pistol shot.

The gay *bravura* notes of a grand piano came, muffled, through a wall. With compelling chords, music was reminding the boy of its existence.

And then—goodness me! Who was that?

A forgotten but frightfully familiar lady in a dark-blue silk dress with a lace collar and lace cuffs came running out through the door. Her eyes were red from tears, excited, happy; her lips were stretched in laughter. Her chin trembled, but whether from laughing or crying Petya couldn't quite be sure.

"Pavlik!"

She tore him from the cook's arms.

"Good gracious! How heavy you've become!"

Pavlik opened eyes turned absolutely black from sleep and remarked, in surprise, but with profound indifference, "Ah, Auntie?"

Then he fell asleep again.

Why, of course, this was Auntie Tatyana! Dear, precious Auntie Tatyana, whom he knew so well but who had simply slipped out of his memory. How could he have failed to recognise her?

"Petya? How huge you are!"

"Do you know what happened to us, Auntie?" Petya began at once. "Auntie, you don't know anything about it! But Auntie, only listen to what happened to us.

Why, Auntie, you're not listening! Auntie, you're not listening!"

"Very well, very well. Wait a minute. Go inside first. Where's Vasili Petrovich?" "Here I am." Father was coming up the stairs.

"Well, here we are. How do you do, Tatyana Ivanovna."

"Welcome home, welcome home! Come in. Were you seasick?"

"Not a bit. We had an excellent trip. Have you any small change? The driver can't change a three-ruble note."

"I'll take care of that. Don't worry about it. Petya, don't trip me up. You'll tell me later. Dunya, be a dear and run down and pay the cabby. You'll find some money on my dressing-table."

The hall into which Petya walked seemed spacious and dim and so strange that at first he failed to recognise even the tall swarthy boy in the straw hat who had suddenly appeared, as if from nowhere, inside the walnut frame of the forgotten but familiar pier-glass lit up by the forgotten but familiar lamp.

But Petya, of all people, should have recognised him instantly, for that boy was himself.

10

AT HOME

On the farm there had been a little room with whitewashed walls and three camp-beds covered with light cotton counterpanes.

An iron washstand. A pine table. A chair. A candle in a glass shade. Green latticed shutters. Floorboards bare of paint from constant scrubbing.

How nice and cool it had been, after eating his fill of clotted milk and grey whole-meal bread, to fall asleep in that sad, empty room to the soothing noise of the sea! Here everything was different.

Here there was a big flat with papered walls and rooms crowded with furniture in loose-covers.

The wallpaper was old, and in each room it had a different design; the furniture was different in each room too.

The bouquets and lozenges on the wallpaper made the rooms seem smaller. The furniture here was called "suites", and it muffled the sound of footsteps and voices. Here, lamps were carried from room to room. In the parlour stood rubber plants with stiff, waxy leaves. Their new shoots stuck out like sharp little daggers sheathed in saffian covers.

When the lamps were moved their light passed from one mirror to another. The vase on top of the piano

shook every time a droshky drove down the street. The clatter of the wheels connected the house with the city.

Petya wanted to finish his tea as quickly as possible. He was dying to run out into the courtyard, for at least a minute, to see the boys and learn the news.

But it was already very late—after nine. All the boys were probably asleep long ago.

He was anxious to tell Auntie Tatyana, or at least Dunya, about the runaway sailor. But they were busy; they were making the beds, fluffing pillows, taking heavy, slippery sheets out of the chest of drawers, carrying lamps from room to room.

Petya followed Auntie Tatyana about. "Why won't you listen to me, Auntie?" he pleaded, stepping on her train. "Please listen."

"You can see I'm busy."

"But Auntie, it won't take long."

"You'll tell me tomorrow."

"Oh, Auntie, don't be so mean! Please let me tell you. Please, Auntie."

"Don't get in my way, Petya. Go and tell it to Dunya."

Petya shambled off glumly to the kitchen, where green onions grew in a wooden box on the windowsill.

Dunya was hastily pressing a pillow-case on an ironing-board covered with a strip of coarse woollen cloth from an army greatcoat. Thick steam rose from the iron.

"Dunya, listen to what happened to us," Petya began in a plaintive voice, gazing at the taut glossy skin on Dunya's bare forearm.

"Don't stand so near, Master Petya. God knows I don't want to burn you with this hot iron."

"But all you have to do is listen."

"Go and tell it to your aunt."

"Auntie doesn't want to listen. I'll tell you instead. Du-unya, please."

"Tell it to the Master."

"Oh, how stupid you are! Father knows all about it."

"Tomorrow, Master Petya, tomorrow."

"But I want to tell you today."

"Please get away from my elbow. Aren't there enough rooms in the house for you? Why do you have to poke your nose into the kitchen?"

"I'll only tell you about it, Dunya dear, and then I'll go right away. Word of honour. By the true and holy Cross."

"What a trial you are! Everything was so quiet until you came back!"

Dunya planked the iron down on the stove, caught up the ironed pillow-case and ran into the next room so impetuously that a breeze passed through the kitchen.

Petya sadly rubbed his eyes with his fists. Suddenly he was taken with such a fit of yawning that he barely managed to drag himself to his bed, where, powerless to unglue his eyes, he pulled off his sailor blouse like a blind man.

The instant his hot cheek touched the pillow he dropped off into a sleep so sound that he did not feel Father's beard when he came, as was his custom, to kiss him goodnight.

Pavlik, however, caused a good deal of bother. He had fallen into such a deep sleep in the cab that Father and Auntie Tatyana had quite a job undressing him.

But the moment they put the child to bed he opened eyes that were absolutely fresh and looked round in astonishment.

"Have we got there yet?"

Auntie Tatyana kissed him tenderly on his hot crimson cheek.

"Yes, my pet. Sleep."

But Pavlik, it appeared, had had a good sleep, and now he was in a mood for talking.

"Is that you, Auntie?"

"Yes, my chick. Go to sleep."

Pavlik lay for a long time with wide-open, attentive eyes—eyes now as dark as olives—listening to the unfamiliar noises of the city flat.

"Auntie, what's making that noise?" he finally said in a frightened whisper.

"Which noise?"

"That snoring noise."

"That's the water in the tap, my pet."

"Is it blowing its nose?"

"Yes. Now go to sleep."

"What's making that whistle?"

"That's a steam-engine."

"Where?"

"Have you really forgotten? At the station just opposite. Go to sleep."

"Why is there music?"

"Someone is playing the piano upstairs. Don't you remember how people play the piano?"

Pavlik was silent for a long time.

One might have thought him to be asleep, except that his eyes shone distinctly in the greenish glow of the night lamp on the chest of drawers. They were following with horror the long rays moving back and forth across the ceiling.

"What's that, Auntie?"

"Those are the lanterns of droshkies passing by outside. Close your eyes."

"And what's that?"

A huge death's-head moth fluttered with ominous thumpings in a corner near the ceiling.

"That's a moth. Go to sleep."

"Will it bite?"

"No, it won't bite. Go to sleep."

"I don't want to sleep. I'm afraid."

"What are you afraid of? Stop imagining things. A big boy like you. Tsk-tsk-tsk!"

Pavlik took a deep, luxurious, quivering breath and caught Auntie's hand in his two hot little hands. "Did you see the Gipsy?" he whispered.

"No, I didn't."

"Did you see the Wolf?"

"No. Go to sleep."

"Did you see the Chimney-Sweep?"

"No, I didn't. You can go to sleep without worrying about a single thing."

Again the boy took a deep, luxurious breath, turned over on his other cheek, and cupped his palm under it.

"Auntie," he mumbled, closing his eyes, "give me the dummy."

"What? I thought you stopped using a dummy long ago."

The "dummy" was the special little clean handkerchief which Pavlik was accustomed to sucking in bed and without which he could not fall asleep.

"Dum-m-m-my. . ." the boy whimpered capriciously.

But Auntie Tatyana did not give him the handkerchief. He was a big boy now. High time he stopped that.

Thereupon Pavlik, continuing to whine, stuffed a corner of the pillow into his mouth and got it all wet; he smiled lazily as his eyes glued together. Suddenly, with a flash of horror, he thought of his moneybox: what if robbers had stolen it? But he had no energy left for worrying.

He fell into a peaceful sleep.

11

GAVRIK

That same day another boy, Gavrik—the one we mentioned while describing the coast near Odessa—woke at dawn from the cold.

He was sleeping on the shore, near the boat, his head on a smooth sea stone and his face covered with his grandfather's old jacket. The jacket did not reach to his feet.

At night it was warm, but towards morning it turned cool. Gavrik's bare feet became chilled. In his sleep he pulled the jacket from his head and wound it round his feet. Then his head began to feel cold.

He started shivering but he did not give in. He tried to fight the cold. He was unable to fall asleep again, however.

Nothing for it but to get up!

Reluctantly Gavrik opened his eyes. He saw a glossy lemon sea and the glow of a murky cherry-coloured dawn in a cloudless grey sky. It was going to be a hot day. But until the sun came up there was no use even thinking about warmth. Of course, Gavrik could very well have slept in the hut, with Grandpa. There it was warm and soft. But show me the boy who will pass by the delightful chance of sleeping on the seashore under the open sky!

Every now and then a wave laps the beach, so softly that it can barely be heard. It breaks and then draws back, lazily dragging pebbles along with it.

The next wave waits a while and then it laps the shore too, and again pebbles are dragged back.

The silvery-black sky is strewn with August stars. The split sleeve of the Milky Way hangs overhead like a vision of a river in the sky.

The sky is reflected in the sea so fully, so richly, that, when you lie on the warm pebbles with your head thrown back, you simply cannot tell which is up and which is down; it's as though you are suspended in the middle of a starry abyss.

Shooting stars streak across the sky in all directions.

In the weeds, crickets chirp. On the bluffs, far, far away, dogs bark.

At first the stars seem to be standing still. But they aren't. When you look at them a long time you can see the whole vault of the sky turning. Some of the stars drop behind the villas. Others, new ones, come up out of the sea.

The breeze changes from warm to cool.

The sky grows whiter, more transparent. The sea darkens. The morning star is reflected in its dark surface like a little moon.

At the villas, the cocks crow sleepily for the third time. Day is breaking.

How can anybody sleep under a roof on a night like that!

Gavrik rose, stretched himself with relish, rolled up his trousers and, yawning, walked into the water up to his ankles.

Had he lost his mind? His feet were blue from the cold, and here he stepped into the sea, the very sight of which was enough to give one the shivers.

But the boy knew what he was doing. The water only looked cold. Actually it was very warm, much warmer than the air. He was simply warming his feet.

Then he washed himself and blew his nose into the sea so loudly that several big-headed fry sleeping peacefully near the shore scattered to right and left and slithered away into deep water.

Yawning and squinting against the rising sun. Gavrik took up the hem of his shirt and dried his face —a mottled little face with a lilac-pink nose which was peeling like a new potato.

"Urrmph, urrmph, urrmph," he grunted, exactly like a grown-up. Unhurriedly he made the sign of the cross over his mouth, in which two front teeth were still missing, picked up the jacket, and started up the hill with the rolling gait of an Odessa fisherman.

He pushed his way through a thick growth of weeds. They sprinkled his wet feet and his trousers with the yellow dust of their pollen.

The hut stood about thirty paces from the beach on a hill of red clay spotted with glistening crystals of shale.

It was actually nothing but a shanty crudely knocked together out of various old pieces of wood— parts of painted planks from boats, boxes, plywood, and masts.

The roof was flat and made of clay, and weeds and tomatoes grew on it.

Grandma, when she was still alive, always used to whitewash the hut twice a year, at Easter and Our Saviour's Day, in order somehow to hide its poverty from people. But then Grandma died, and for three years now no one had whitewashed the hut. Its walls had peeled and turned dark. Here and there, though, there were still faint traces of whitewash in the old wood. They constantly reminded Gavrik of Grandma and of her life, a life less lasting even than whitewash.

Gavrik was an orphan. His father he did not remember at all. Of his mother he had a hazy memory: a steaming trough, red hands, a Kiev signet ring on a smooth swollen finger, and a mass of soap bubbles with rainbows in them flying round the metal combs in her hair.

Grandpa was already up. He was walking through the tiny weed-grown, refuse-strewn vegetable patch, where a few late pumpkin flowers gleamed—large orange-coloured fleshy and hairy flowers with a sweet liquid at the bottom of their transparent cups.

Grandpa was gathering tomatoes in his shirt; the shirt had been washed so often that it had lost all colour, but now, in the glow of the rising sun, it was a delicate pink.

Between the turned-up shirt and the baggy trousers there showed a strip of lean brown stomach with the black dimple of the navel.

Very few tomatoes were left in the patch. They had eaten nearly all of them. Grandpa managed to find eight little yellowish ones. That was all there were.

The old man walked along with his grey head bent and his chin, smooth-shaven like a soldier's, against his chest. He turned aside the weeds with his bare feet, hoping to find something there. But he found nothing.

A pullet with a piece of rag round her leg ran after Grandpa, pecking occasionally at the ground and making the little umbrellas of fennel up above tremble. Grandfather and grandson did not greet each other or wish each other good morning. But that did not mean they had quarrelled. On the contrary, they were great friends.

It was simply that the new morning promised nothing but hard work and cares. There was no use deceiving each other with empty wishes.

"We've eaten them all; there's none left," Grandpa muttered, as if continuing a conversation left off the day before. "Just think of it. Eight tomatoes—call that food? It's a joke!"

Gavrik put his hand to his eyes and looked at the sun. "Are we going?"

"We'll have to," said Grandpa. He came out of the vegetable patch.

They went into the hut and slowly drank some water from a bucket neatly covered with a clean board.

The old man gave a grunt, and Gavrik grunted too. The grandfather tightened his belt another notch, and the grandson did likewise.

Grandpa took a chunk of yesterday's bread from the shelf and tied it, together with the tomatoes, in a cotton kerchief with black polka dots.

Then, with a small flat keg of water under his arm, he walked out of the hut and hung a padlock on the door.

This was an unnecessary precaution. In the first place, there was nothing to steal, and in the second place, who would stoop so low as to rob paupers?

Gavrik took the oars from the roof and heaved them up on his small but sturdy shoulder.

A busy day lay ahead of grandfather and grandson. Two days before, a storm had raged. The waves had torn the line. The fish were keeping away. They had had no catch. And there was not a kopek left.

Yesterday the sea had calmed down and they had set the line for the night.

Today they had to pull it out, get the fish to market in time, bait the line, and in the evening set it again without fail, so as not to miss the good weather.

They dragged the boat across the pebbly beach and carefully pushed it into the sea.

Gavrik, standing knee-deep in the water, put the fish tank—a boat-shaped box with small holes in it—in the stern and gave the boat a strong push. He ran along with it a few paces and then stretched himself out prone on its side; he dangled his feet above the sliding water, and glistening drops fell from them.

Only after the boat had moved out about five yards did he crawl in and sit down at the oar next to Grandpa.

Each worked one oar. That was easy, and besides it was fun to see who could outpull the other. But they both wore indifferent frowns on their faces and merely grunted from time to time.

Gavrik felt a pleasant glow in the palms of his hands. When his oar was in the transparent green of the sea it seemed broken. The narrow blade moved tautly through the water, sending back little eddies.

The boat went ahead in spurts, swerving now to the right, now to the left. First the grandfather leaned on his oar, and then the grandson.

"Oo-oof!" grunted Grandpa, pulling with all his strength.

The boat veered sharply to the left.

Gavrik gave a louder "Oo-oof!" and the boat veered to the right.

The grandfather braced a bare foot with a gnarled big toe against the thwart and took short sharp strokes. The grandson did not let himself be outdone. He braced both feet and bit his lip.

"Bet you can't outpull me, Grandpa," Gavrik said through set teeth, the sweat pouring from him.

Grandpa grunted. He was breathing heavily.

"Bet I can. "

"Not on your life."

"We'll see." 'We'll see."

But though Grandpa leaned on his oar as hard as he could, nothing came of it. He wasn't the man he used to be! Besides, his grandson had grown to be quite a fellow. He was small, true enough, but as stubborn as they came! Not afraid to challenge his own grandfather!

Grandpa gave angry frowns as he glanced sidewise from under his grizzled brows at the boy beside him. But his old watery eyes twinkled with merriment and wonder.

And so, neither outdoing the other, they rowed to the place about a mile from shore where the faded little flags of their line were bobbing up and down on corks amid the waves.

By this time the sea was covered with fishing boats out for the catch.

The blue beauty *Nadya and Vera*, a new boat, passed by under full sail, her flat notched bottom rearing one-third out of the water and slapping down hard against the waves.

Sprawled carelessly in the stern, with a black sunflower seed stuck to his lip, lay Fedya, a fisherman from Maly Fontan whom Gavrik knew well.

From under the oilcloth peak of his navy-blue cap with anchor-design buttons there lazily looked out a pair of fine, languid eyes almost completely covered by a spray-darkened forelock.

Fedya lay with the weight of his back against the sharply turned tiller and did not even deign a glance at Grandpa's pathetic little boat.

But when Fedya's brother Vasya, who was wearing a short-sleeved striped jersey, caught sight of Gavrik he stopped unwinding the fishing line and, shielding his eyes against the sun with his hand, cried out, "Ahoy, Gavrik old man! Don't give in! Hold on to the water and you'll never drown!"

The *Nadya and Vera* sped by, dousing grandfather and grandson with a fountain of spray.

Of course, no offence had been meant. It was a friendly practical joke. Still, Grandpa pretended he had not heard a word; in his heart of hearts he was hurt.

For there was a time when Grandpa, too, had owned an excellent boat with a new, strong sail. He used to fish for mackerel. And what catches! There were days when Grandma, rest her soul, took two or three hundred to market.

But now his life was over. All he had left was a pauper's hut on the shore and an old boat without a sail.

The sail had gone to pay the doctors during Grandma's illness. But all for nothing: she had died anyway. Now he would never be able to get a sail like that again.

And what kind of fishing was this without a sail? It was a joke! Catching bullheads with a line. Ah, me!

Gavrik guessed what Grandpa was thinking about, but gave no sign. On the contrary, to divert the old man from his bitter thoughts he busied himself with the line. He began pulling up the first flag.

The grandfather at once crawled over the seat to his grandson, and together they started to pull in the wet end of the line.

Soon they came to the hooks. But they found few bullheads on them, and small ones at that.

Gavrik took the big-headed little fishes firmly by their slippery gills, deftly pulled the hooks out of their rapacious jaws and threw them into the tank, which had been lowered into the sea.

But barely three hooks out of ten had a real catch. On the others dangled small fry or crabs.

"They don't go for shrimps," Grandpa muttered sadly. "Just think of it. Nothing but small fry. Meat's the bait to use. They'd go for meat all right. But how to get meat when it's eleven kopeks a pound at the market! It's a joke!"

Suddenly a tremendous hulk pouring forth brown smoke bore down on them. Two slanting shadows flew over the waves. The sea burst into frightful noise. A steamer passed by close to the boat, her red float-boards working busily.

The boat was thrown up, then let down, then thrown up again.

The flags of the line bobbed frantically, almost under the paddle-wheels. A little closer and they would have been ground into splinters.

"Hi there, on the *Turgenev!"* Grandpa shouted in an unrecognisable voice, spreading out his arms as though trying to stop a galloping horse. "Gone blind? Can't you see the line? Filthy pigs!"

But the steamer had already passed by.

She was noisily drawing away—with her tricolour flag at the stern, with her life-belts and life-boats, with her passengers, with her columns of brown anthracite smoke— leaving behind a broad, snow-white, lacy pattern on the clear dark-green water.

That meant it was seven o'clock in the morning.

The *Turgenev* served the fishermen as a clock. At eight in the evening she would pass on her way back to Odessa from Akkerman.

To get the bullheads to market in time they would have to hurry.

Grandfather and grandson made a hasty breakfast of tomatoes and bread washed down with water from the keg, which by now had turned warm and taken on an oaky flavour. Then they quickly went back to their work on the line.

12

"CALL THAT A HORSE?"

At about nine o'clock Gavrik was on his way to town, with the tank of bullheads on his shoulder. He could have put them in a basket, of course, but the tank made a better impression. It showed that he was carrying live, absolutely fresh fish straight out of the sea.

Grandpa remained at home to mend the line.

Although Gavrik was only nine, Grandpa had no qualms about entrusting him with such an important mission as the sale of the fish. He relied on his grandson fully. The lad had a head on his shoulders. He was not a baby.

Whom else could the old man depend upon if not his own grandson?

Gavrik was fully aware of the importance and responsibility of his job, and it was with a businesslike and preoccupied air that he tramped along the hot path among the strong-smelling bushes, leaving in the dust distinct imprints of his small feet with all their ten toes.

His air of concentration and importance as much as said: "You may do what you like—swim in the sea, lounge about on the sand, ride a bicycle, or drink soda water at the stand. Me, I'm a fisherman, and my job is to catch bullheads and sell them at the market. Nothing else concerns me."

As he passed the beach house, where over the cashier's window hung a spotted black board with the figure "76°" chalked on it, Gavrik gave a scornful and disgusted smile at what he saw: a chubby white-bodied man with a handkerchief on his bald head had stopped up his nose and ears with his fingers and was ducking himself in the clayey water near the shore, staying close to the safety-rope, which was covered with a slimy green beard.

There were two ways of getting to the top of the bluff: by the long sloping path that had three turns in it,

or by the steep, almost perpendicular wooden stairway with rotting steps.

Gavrik, it goes without saying, chose the stairway.

Compressing his lips, he ran quickly to the very top without once pausing for breath.

A dusty but shady lane brought him past the "Warm Sea-Baths Establishment" to the Military School.

There he was practically in town.

In the shade of the dappled plane trees of French Boulevard an open horse-tram was lumbering along towards Arcadia. The sunny side of the tram was covered with an awning. A sheaf of bamboo fishing-rods, with red-and-blue floats, jutted out from the rear platform. Three lively old mares clicked their hoofs along the fine gravel. The brakes screeched and moaned at the turns.

But what really drew the boy's attention was the *kvass* stand.

It was a big box-like affair with a double-sloping roof that rested on two posts. The outside was painted green and the inside white—thick, shiny oil paint.

As to the *kvass* man, he was so extraordinarily elegant and handsome that every time Gavrik passed by that corner he stopped to marvel and envy.

Gavrik never gave much thought to what he would be when he grew up. There wasn't any particular choice. But if he *did* have a choice, it would be a *kvass* man, of course.

All the Odessa kvass vendors were as spruce and handsome as a picture. And this one especially. He was the dead spit of Vanka Klyuchnik."

Yes, that was it. With his high merchant's cap of fine navy-blue serge, his blond curls, and his shiny high boots. And the shirt! Lord, a shirt like that was fit to be worn only on Easter Sunday: bright-red, with sleeves like balloons, and long—all the way to the knees, with a hundred blue glass buttons!

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Over the shirt he wore a black waistcoat with a silver watch-chain fastened in a buttonhole with a little silver rod.

One look at that flaming shirt was enough to make anybody pant for a drink of cold *kvass.*

And the way he worked! Quickly, deftly, smoothly.

"Give us a glass, laddie," a customer would say.

"Which would you like? The sour or the sweet? The sweet's a kopek a mug, and the sour's two for a kopek."

"I'll have the sour."

"Coming right up."

In the twinkling of an eye one hand lifted the round cover of the locker by the ring and dipped into the deep icy darkness for a bottle, while the other wiped the white counter with a rag—it was dry anyway—rinsed a huge mug with a thick false bottom in a pail of water, smartly turned the mug over and set it down with a bang in front of the customer.

The small corkscrew bit into the cork. The bottle, pressed between the boots, exploded. Out of its neck rose long ringlets of brown foam.

The handsome fellow turned the bottle over into the mug, filling one-quarter with lemon-yellow *kvass* and three-quarters with foam.

The customer eagerly blew off the foam and then drank and drank and drank. Meanwhile Vanka Klyuchnik wiped the counter with a flourish and swept the wet kopek with the eagle on it into a tin box which once had held Krakhmalnikov Bros, lozenges.

There was a man! That was the life!

Naturally, Gavrik was dying for a drink of *kvass,* but he had no money. Perhaps on the way back, although that was doubtful. The fact was that though there were about two hundred bullheads in the tank, Grandpa was heavily in debt to the fishwife with whom they dealt. The week before, he had borrowed three rubles from her for corks and hooks for the line and had returned only one ruble forty-five. That left the debt at more than a ruble and a half—a huge sum.

If the fishwife agreed not to hold back all the money everything would be fine. But what if she kept all of it? In that case they would be lucky to have enough to buy meat for bait and bread, let alone *kvass.*

Gavrik spat, exactly the way grown-up fishermen do when burdened with cares.

He shifted the tank to the other shoulder and continued on his way, carrying with him in his mind's eye the handsome picture of Vanka Klyuchnik and the fragrant coolness of the sour *kvass* he had not drunk.

From here on stretched real city streets, with tall houses, shops, warehouses, gateways.

Everything lay in the mottled shade of acacias whose leaves shone like long green grapes.

A closed wagon clattered down the street. The patches of shade sped downwards along the horses in their high German collars, along the driver, and along the white sides with the sign: "Artificial-Ice Plant."

Cooks carrying baskets walked by. The shade slipped across them too.

Dogs with tongues hanging out ran up to the water tins attached to the trunks of trees. With their tails curled up into a loop, they lapped the warm water, extremely pleased with the Odessa city council for seeing to it that they did not go mad from thirst.

All this was familiar, humdrum.

But here was something to marvel at—a little cart with a pony harnessed to it. Gavrik had never seen such a little horse in all his life. It was no bigger than a calf but otherwise exactly like a real horse.

A tan, fat-bellied little thing with a chocolate-coloured mane and a small but bushy tail, in a straw hat with holes for the ears, with shaggy eyelashes raised, it stood quietly and modestly, like a well-bred little girl, in the shade of the acacias at the entrance to a house.

A group of children had gathered round it.

Gavrik walked over and stood for a long time in silence. He did not know how to react to this phenomenon. There was no doubt about it: he liked the little horse, but at the same time it irritated him.

He inspected it from all sides. Yes, it was a horse: hoofs, forelock, teeth. But how disgustingly small!

"Call that a horse?" he said with scorn, wrinkling his nose.

"It's *not* a horse, it's *not a* horse," chanted a little girl with two pigtails, squatting in glee and clapping her hands. "It's not a horse at all. It's only a *pony."*

"It *is a* horse," Gavrik said gloomily. The very next instant he was annoyed and ashamed at having let

himself be drawn into conversation with such a beribboned little creature.

"It's a pony, it's a pony!"

"From the circus," Gavrik remarked in a hoarse bass, as though addressing no one in particular. "An ordinary one from the circus."

"It's *not* from the circus, it's *not* from the circus! It's a pony, and it's delivering Nobel paraffin. See the tins?"

Yes, in the cart stood shiny paraffin tins.

This came as a complete surprise to Gavrik. Paraffin, as everybody knew, was bought in a shop in one's own bottle at a kopek a quart.

But for it to be delivered to homes in a cart, and a cart drawn by a fancy pony—that was a bit too much!

"It's a plain horse!" Gavrik retorted angrily as he walked away.

"It's a pony! It's a pony! It's a pony!" the little girl called after him like a parrot, jumping up and down and clapping her hands.

"You're a pony yourself," thought Gavrik. But unfortunately he had no time for a real argument.

After skirting the public garden, through whose iron fence came the hot, dry fragrance of myrtle and thuja with its tart little cones, the boy stopped, threw back his head and stared for a rather long time at the clock on the railway station.

He had learned to tell time only recently, and now he could not pass a clock without stopping to reckon.

He still counted on his fingers those strange little sticks of Roman numerals which were so unlike the usual figures in arithmetic. He knew only that the top figure was twelve and that it was from there you had to start counting.

He set the fish tank down at his feet. His lips began to move. "One, two, three, four," he whispered, crinkling his forehead and bending his fingers back firmly.

The small hand pointed to nine and the big one to six.

"Nine and a half," the boy said with a sigh of satisfaction, wiping the sweat from his nose with the tail of his shirt.

That was what it looked like, but it would do no harm to check.

"What time is it?"

A gentleman in a pongee jacket and a tropical helmet put a golden pince-nez to his Roman nose, tilted his short grey beard, threw a glance at the clock, and said quickly, "Nine-thirty."

Gavrik was dumbfounded.

"But doesn't it say nine and a half?"

"That means it's nine-thirty," the man said sternly, without looking at the boy. Then he climbed into a cab and drove off, holding his ivory-handled walking stick between his knees.

Gavrik stood there for a while, his mouth with its missing teeth open, trying to decide whether the

gentleman had been making fun of him or whether it was really so.

Finally he raised the tank to his shoulder, hitched up his trousers and continued on his way, turning his head from side to side and smiling mistrustfully.

So nine and a half was the same as nine-thirty! Queer. Very queer. At any rate, it wouldn't hurt to ask someone who knew.

13

MADAM STOROZHENKO

"Lobsters! Lobsters! Lobsters! Lobsters!"

"Flat-fish! Flat-fish! Flat-fish!"

"Live mackerel! Mackerel! Mackerel!"

"Mullet! Mullet!"

"Middies! Middies! Middies! Middies! Middies!"

"Bullheads! Bullheads! Bullheads!"

The loudest and shrillest voices of all the market women belonged to the fishwives: Fish Row was famous for that.

You had to have the calm courage of Odessa housewives and cooks to walk at a leisurely pace along that lane of tables, baskets and vats piled with fish and lobsters and other shellfish.

Under sheds and huge canvas sun-shades the quivering, gleaming riches of the Black Sea lay spread out for all to behold.

What a variety of shapes, colours and sizes!

Nature had done all she could to safeguard her wonderful creations and protect them from destruction, to make them as unnoticeable as possible to the human eye. She had camouflaged them in all the tints of the sea.

Take that noble and expensive fish, the mackerel, queen of the Black Sea. Her taut body, as straight and smooth as a spindle, was coloured in the most delicate moire shades ranging from sky-blue to deep-blue.

This, Gavrik knew, was the colour of the sea far from shore, and just where shoals of mackerel usually passed.

A crafty creature, the mackerel!

Although Gavrik saw mackerel every day and could spot a shoal half a mile away, he never failed to marvel at how beautiful and clever they were.

Or take bullheads. Their haunt was the rocks near the shore, and also the sandy bottom. That was why they were brownish like the rocks or yellowish like the sand.

Just think of it!

Then there were the big flat-fish, which preferred the slimy bottom of quiet little bays. The striking thing about these fish was the greenish-black colour of their thick skin, covered with flat bony bumps like seashells. Flat-fish had both their eyes on the upper side, and they reminded you of the charcoal drawings children make on fences: a head in profile, but with two eyes.

True, flat-fish had wax-coloured bellies, like a sucking-pig's, but they never showed them; they always lay at the bottom, hugging the sand.

The boy marvelled at the craftiness of the flat-fish too.

There was also the mullet, a humpbacked little red-and-black fish with big scales that looked blood-stained.

Large pink seashells exactly like them glittered at the bottom of the clearest bays.

As to silversides, these swarmed at the surface of the sea near the shore, where they could not be told apart from the silvery Hashes of the morning sun.

Yes, Nature was crafty. But man, Gavrik knew, was craftier. He placed his nets, he cast his invisible fishing lines, he flashed his spoon-bait and flies—and then these fish, which you could never notice in the sea, showed all the splendour of their magic colours in the baskets and on the stalls of the marketplace.

Money for good tackle—that was the main thing!

Looking for his fishwife, the boy walked past baskets swarming with light-green lobsters. They made a rustling sound as they reached upwards with nippers spread apart convulsively, like scissors.

The silversides were glistening heaps of silver coins.

Under their wet netting the springy shrimps made a clicking noise and shot out salt in all directions.

Shiny scales stuck to the boy's bare feet. His heels slid on fish guts.

Scrawny market cats, their eyes insane, with pupils narrowed to vertical slits, crept along the ground in search of prey, ears flattened back and shoulder-blades jutting up rapaciously.

Housewives carrying string bags with carrots sticking out of them weighed thick slices of flat-fish in their hands.

The sun was burning hot. The fish were dying.

The market-woman Gavrik was looking for sat on a child's bench under a canvas sun-shade big enough for a giant, surrounded by baskets of fish.

The huge woman was dressed, despite the heat, in a winter jacket with puffed sleeves, and she had a sand-coloured shawl wrapped crosswise over her bosom; across one shoulder hung a heavy money-bag.

Gavrik stopped respectfully at a distance to wait until she finished bargaining with a customer.

He knew very well that he and Grandpa were completely dependent upon this woman, and that meant he had to be as polite and unassuming as possible. If he had worn a hat he would have removed it. But he wore no hat, and so he did the best he could: he set the fish tank gently on the ground, let his arms hang at his sides, and looked down at his bare shuffling feet with their grey suede socks of dust reaching to the ankles.

The customer was buying only two dozen bullheads but the bargaining went on a frightfully long time.

She walked away ten times, and ten times she came back. Ten times the fishwife picked up the brass pans

of her balance all covered with fish scales, and ten times she threw them back into the basket of flat-fish.

The fishwife gesticulated rapidly with her fleshy hands in their black knitted mitts, not forgetting to hold her little finger out at an elegant angle.

She ran her sleeve across her shiny purplish-red face with its black moustache and grey ringlets of hair on the chin. She nervously pushed big iron hairpins back into place in her greasy jet-black hair.

"Just look at them, madam," she cried hoarsely. "You won't find bullheads like these anywhere else. I tell you, these bullheads are worth their weight in gold!"

"They're tiny," the customer said, walking away in disdain. "Not even worth frying."

"Come back, madam! You say they're not worth frying? Where'll you find bigger ones? Maybe from the Jews! Then go to 'em! You know me. I'd never palm off small fry on a steady customer!"

"Ten kopeks a dozen for these bullheads? Never! Not a kopek more than eight."

"Two dozen for nineteen."

"For that money I'd rather go somewhere else and buy salmon."

"My last price is eighteen, madam. Take it or leave it. Where are you going, madam?"

At last the deal took place. The fishwife gave the customer the bullheads and threw the coins into her moneybag.

Gavrik waited patiently until the fishwife took notice of him. She knew he was there, but she pretended for a long time not to see him.

Such was the custom of the market-place. If you needed money, you had to wait. Nothing terrible about it. A person wouldn't die if he stood there a while.

"Fresh fish! Live bullheads! Flat-fish! Flat-fish! Flatfish!" The fishwife paused for breath and then suddenly said, without looking at Gavrik, "Well, show it here!"

The boy opened the fish tank and moved it over to her.

"Bullheads," he said respectfully.

She dipped her paw into the tank and pulled some out with a practised hand. She gave them a quick glance and then stared at Gavrik, her round eyes as blue-black as Isabella grapes.

"Well? Where's the bullheads?"

Gavrik was silent.

"Where's the bullheads, I ask you?"

The boy sadly shifted his feet and gave a modest smile, trying to turn the unpleasant conversation into a joke.

"Why, there they are, ma'am. You're holding them. Can't you see?"

"Where's the bullheads?" the fishwife suddenly screamed, turning red as a beet with rage. "Where are they? Where? Show me. I don't see 'em. D'you mean to say what I'm holding in my hand? These ain't bullheads —they're lice! Anything here worth frying? Not a

thing! All you ever bring me is small fry! Take your small fry to the Jews!"

Gavrik was silent.

He couldn't call them big bullheads, of course, but still they weren't as tiny as the screaming fishwife made them out to be. However, he was not in a position to argue.

When the fishwife finished shouting she coolly transferred the bullheads from the tank to her basket, deftly counting them off by tens.

Her hands moved so quickly that Gavrik was unable to keep count. He felt she was cheating him. But there was no way of checking, for there were other bullheads in her basket.

Who could tell which was which?

Gavrik was struck with horror. He broke into a sweat from excitement.

"To make it a round number, two hundred and fifty," said the fishwife, covering the basket with a strip of sacking. "Take you tank, and good-bye. Tell your grandfather he still owes me eighty kopeks. Tell him not to forget. And tell him not to send me any more teenies—I won't take 'em!"

The boy was dumbfounded. He tried to say something but his throat contracted.

The fishwife was not paying him the slightest attention. She was calling her wares again.

"Flat-fish, flat-fish, flat-fish! Bullheads, bullheads, bullheads!"

"Madam Storozhenko," the boy finally managed to get out, "Madam Storozhenko. . . ."

She turned her head impatiently. "You still here? Well?"

"Madam Storozhenko, how much are you paying me for a hundred?"

"Thirty kopeks a hundred, seventy-five for the lot. You owed me a ruble fifty-five and now you owe me eighty kopeks. Tell that to your grandfather. Good-bye."

"Thirty kopeks a hundred!"

Gavrik was so hurt and so angry he wanted to shout, to punch her in the nose with all his might, so that blood flowed from it. Yes, so that the blood flowed. Or to bite her.

But instead he gave a quick, fawning smile. "Madam Storozhenko," he muttered, almost in tears, "but you always used to pay us forty-five."

"You're lucky you're getting thirty for such trash. Now be off!"

"But Madam Storozhenko, you're getting eighty for 'em. . . ."

"Clear out and stop pestering me! It's my fish and I set my own price. I don't take no orders from you. Flatfish! Flat-fish! Flat-fish!"

Gavrik looked at Madam Storozhenko. She sat on her child's bench—huge, unapproachable, stony.

He could have told her that Grandpa and he had no money at all, that they absolutely had to buy bread,

and meat for bait, and that all they needed was fifteen or twenty kopeks. But was it worth humbling himself?

The pride of fisherfolk spoke up in the boy.

With his sleeve he wiped away the tears that were stinging his peeled nose, blew his nose into the dust with two fingers, raised the light fish tank to his shoulder and walked off with his rolling gait of the Black Sea fisherman.

As he walked along he wondered where he could get some meat and bread.

14

"LOWER RANKS"

Although, as we have seen, Gavrik had a life of toil and cares, quite like a grown-up, we must not forget that he was, after all, only a boy of nine.

He had friends with whom he liked to play, run, scrap, catch sparrows, shoot with catapults and do everything else all Odessa boys of poor families did.

He belonged to the category known as "street urchins", and this gave him a wide acquaintance.

Nobody prevented him from going into any courtyard or playing in any street.

He was as free as a bird. The whole city was his.

Even the freest bird, however, has its favourite haunts, and Gavrik's were the seaside streets in the Otrada and Maly Fontan districts. There he was an

unchallenged king among the boys, who envied and admired his independent life.

Gavrik had many friends, but only one real chum, Petya.

The simplest thing would be to go and see Petya and put their heads together about bread and meat.

Naturally, Petya didn't have any money, especially a big sum like fifteen kopeks. There was no use even thinking about that. But Petya could take a chunk of meat from the kitchen and some bread from the cupboard.

Gavrik had been inside Petya's house once, as his guest last Christmas, and he knew very well that they had a cupboard piled with bread and that nobody gave it any notice. It would be no bother at all to bring out as much as half a loaf. Those people didn't pay any attention to things like bread.

But the trouble was he didn't know whether Petya had come back from the country. He ought to be back by now, of course. Several times during the summer Gavrik had gone to Petya's yard to find out. But Petya had been still away.

The last time their cook, Dunya, said they would soon come. That was about five days ago. Perhaps they were already there.

From the market Gavrik set out for Petya's. Luckily, it was not far away: Kulikovo Field and the corner of Kanatnaya, just opposite the railway station and next to the Army Staff building. It was a big four-storey house with two front entrances. And a wonderful house

it was; if you wanted to live like a lord, you couldn't find a better.

In the first place, it was just the thing for street fights because it had two gateways: one leading out to Kulikovo Field, or simply Kulichki, and the other to a marvellous vacant lot with bushes, tarantula holes, and a rubbish-heap; only a small rubbish-heap, true, but an exceptionally rich one.

If you dug properly in it, you could always collect a mass of useful things—from chemist's vials to dead rats.

Petya was lucky. It wasn't every chap had a refuse-heap like that next to his house!

In the second place, little suburban trains drawn by a tiny engine ran past the house, so that you didn't have to go very far to put a cap or a stone under the wheels.

In the third place, the Army Staff building was next door.

Behind its high stone wall facing the field lay a mysterious world guarded day and night by sentries. Behind that wall were the rumbling machines of the Army Staff printing plant. And what interesting scraps of paper the wind carried over the wall: ribbons, strips, vermicelli!

The windows of the staff clerks' quarters faced the field too. By standing on a rock one could look through the grating and see how the clerks lived, those extraordinarily handsome, important and dashing young men in the long trousers of officers but with the shoulder straps of privates.

Gavrik had learned from reliable sources that the clerks belonged to the ordinary "lower ranks", that is to say, were plain soldiers. But what a world of difference between them and the soldiers!

With the possible exception of the *kvass* vendors, the staff clerks were the most elegant, best-dressed and handsomest fellows in town.

When they saw a clerk the chambermaids from the nearby houses turned pale and began to tremble and looked as though they would faint any minute. They mercilessly scorched their hair and temples with curling-irons, they dabbed their noses with tooth powder and they rouged their cheeks with toffee paper. But the clerks paid no attention to them.

To any Odessa soldier a chambermaid was a superior and unapproachable being, but to a staff clerk she was no more than "a dull peasant" and not worthy of a glance.

In their rooms behind the grating the staff clerks sat on iron beds softly strumming guitars; they were sad and lonely. They sat without their jackets, in long trousers with a broad red stitched belting, and clean shirts with black neckties such as officers wore.

If a staff clerk appeared in the street of a Sunday evening, it was always arm in arm with two seamstresses wearing their hair puffed up high in front.

Staff clerks were unbelievably rich. With his own eyes Gavrik once saw one of them riding in a droshky.

But strange as it seemed, staff clerks belonged to the "lower ranks". At the corner of Pirogovskaya and

Kulikovo Field Gavrik once saw, with his own eyes, a general in silver shoulder straps striking a clerk across the mouth and shouting in a voice that sent shivers down Gavrik's back, "Is that the way to stand, you dog? Is that the way?"

The clerk stood stiffly at attention and rolled his head, his light-blue peasant eyes bulging like a common soldier's. "Sorry, Your Excellency!" he muttered. "I'll never do it again!"

It was this dual position that made the staff clerks, such strange, wonderful and at the same time pathetic creatures, like fallen angels exiled as punishment from heaven to earth.

The life of the ordinary sentries, whose quarters were next door to the staff clerks, was very interesting too.

These soldiers also had two natures.

One was when they stood in pairs, in full sentry uniform, with their cartridge belts, at the alabaster front entrance of the Army Staff building, springing smartly to attention and presenting arms the way sergeants did, that is, shifting their well-greased bayonets slightly to the side whenever an officer came in or went out.

The other was a plain, domestic, peasant nature, when they sat in their barracks sewing on buttons, polishing their boots or playing draughts—"dames", as they called it.

Bowls and wooden spoons were always drying on their windowsills, and there were many left-over

pieces of black army bread which they readily gave to beggars.

They readily talked to boys, too, but the questions they asked and the words they used made the boys blush to their ears and run away horrified.

The two courtyards were asphalted and were just the place for playing hopscotch. Fine squares and numbers could be drawn on the asphalt with charcoal or chalk. The smooth sea pebbles slid across it wonderfully.

If the janitor lost his temper at the hullabaloo raised by the playing children and went after them with his broom, there was nothing easier than running into the next courtyard.

Besides, the house had wonderful and mysterious cellars with woodbins.

It was simply marvellous to hide in those cellars among the firewood and various junk, in the dry, dusty darkness, while out in the yard it was bright daylight.

In a word, the house where Petya lived was an excellent place in every respect.

Gavrik entered the yard and stopped under the windows of Petya's flat, which was on the second storey.

The yard, split diagonally by the distinct midday shadow, was absolutely empty. Not a boy in sight. Evidently they were all in the country or at the seaside.

Shuttered windows. The hot, lazy stillness of noon. Not a sound.

But from somewhere far away—perhaps even as far as Botanicheskaya Street—came the spluttering and popping noise of a red-hot frying pan. Judging by the smell, it was grey mullet being fried in sunflower oil.

"Petya!" Gavrik called, his hands cupped round his mouth.

Silence.

"Pe-et-ya!"

Closed shutters.

"Pe-e-e-et-ya-a-a!!"

The kitchen window opened and the white-kerchiefed head of Dunya, the cook, looked out.

"They haven't come yet." It was the usual reply, spoken quickly.

"When will they?"

"We expect them this evening."

The boy spat on the ground and rubbed the spittle with his foot. He was silent for a while.

"Please, ma'am, as soon as he comes tell him Gavrik was here."

"Yes, Your Honour."

"Tell him I'll drop round tomorrow morning."

"It'll be quite all right if you don't. Our Petya will be going to school this year. And that means good-bye to all your monkey-business."

"Never mind," Gavrik muttered dourly. "Only don't forget to tell him. Will you?"

"I'll tell him, don't cry."

"Good-bye, ma'am."

"Good-bye, you beauty."

Dunya, it seemed, was so fed up with doing nothing all summer long that she had descended to an exchange of banter with a little ragamuffin.

Gavrik hitched up his trousers and strolled out of the yard.

A bad business! What next?

He could, of course, go to his big brother Terenti at Near Mills. But in the first place, Near Mills was a long way off, and the walk there and back would take a good four hours. And in the second place, after the disturbances he didn't know whether Terenti would be at home or not. Quite likely he was in hiding somewhere or else had nothing to eat himself.

What sense was there in wearing out his feet for nothing? They were his own, weren't they?

The boy walked out on the field and looked in at the barracks windows as he passed by.

The soldiers had just finished their midday meal and were rinsing their spoons on the windowsill. A pile of leftover bread was drying under the hot sun.

The bread was black and spongy, with a chestnut-coloured crust that actually *looked* sour, and flies were crawling over it.

Gavrik stopped near a window, entranced by the sight of such abundance.

He was silent for a while, and then to his own surprise he blurted out roughly, "Give me some bread!"

But he immediately remembered himself, picked up his tank and walked away. "I didn't mean it," he said,

showing the soldiers his gap-toothed smile. "I don't want any."

The soldiers crowded at the windowsill, calling and whistling to the boy. "Hi there! Where you running to? Come back!"

They stretched out pieces of bread to him through the grating. "Take it. Don't be afraid."

He stopped in indecision.

"Hold out your shirt."

There was so much good-natured gaiety in their shouts and in the fuss they were making that Gavrik saw there would be nothing humiliating about it if he did take some bread from them. He walked back and held out his shirt.

Chunks of bread flew into it.

"Won't do you any harm to try our army bread and get used to it!"

In addition to about five pounds of bread, the soldiers gave Gavrik a good helping of yesterday's porridge.

He stowed it all neatly into the fish tank, accompanied by earthy jokes about the effect of army rations on the stomach, set out for home to help Grandpa mend the line.

Late that afternoon they put out to sea again.

15

THE BOAT AT SEA

When he saw that the steamer did not stop and did not lower a boat, but continued on her course, the sailor calmed down a bit and began to think clearly.

His first concern was to throw off some of his clothes; they interfered with his swimming.

The jacket was water-logged and as heavy as iron, but it came off easiest of all. He did it in three movements, turning over several times and spitting out the bitter, salty sea water.

For a while the jacket floated along after him with its sleeves spread out, like a living thing; it did not want to part from its master and tried to wind itself round his legs.

After the sailor had kicked the jacket a few times it fell behind and slowly sank, swaying and dropping from layer to layer until it was lost in the depths to which the cloudy shafts of the late afternoon light faintly penetrated.

The boots gave him the most trouble of all. They stuck as though filled with glue.

He furiously scraped one foot against the other to throw off those coarse navy boots with the rust-coloured tops which had given him away. Paddling with his arms, he danced in the water; one minute his head went under, the next his shoulders reared up over the surface.

But the boots would not yield. He filled his lungs with air and then, dropping his head under the surface, tugged at the slippery heel of one of the boots, mentally letting out a string of the vilest oaths and cursing everything under the sun.

At last he pulled off that damned boot. The second came easier.

However, the relief Rodion felt when he had got rid of his boots and trousers was accompanied by an overpowering weariness. The sea water, of which he had swallowed a good deal despite all his precautions, had set his throat afire. Besides, he had smacked the water painfully hard in his dive from the ship.

The past two days he had had hardly any sleep, had walked about forty or fifty miles, and had been under great nervous strain. Now everything was going dark before his eyes. Or was that because evening was falling fast?

The water had lost its daytime colour. The surface had become a bright, glossy heliotrope, while the depths were a frightening colour, almost black.

From where he was, the sailor could not see the shore at all. The horizon had narrowed almost to nothingness. The edge of the cloudless sky was touched with a transparent green afterglow, and a faint, barely perceptible star twinkled in it.

That showed where the shore was and which way he had to swim.

All he now had on was his shirt and underdrawers, and these were no hindrance. But his head whirled,

and the joints of his arms and legs ached. With every minute he found it harder to swim.

At times he felt he was losing consciousness. At others he was on the verge of vomiting. Every now and then he was seized by a brief, sudden paroxysm of fear. His loneliness and the depth frightened him.

Never before had he felt like that. He must be ill, he thought.

His short wet hair seemed dry and hot and so coarse that he could almost feel it pricking his head.

There was not a soul in sight. Overhead, in the empty darkening air, a sturdy-winged gull with a body as plump as a cat's flew by. In its long bent beak was a small fish.

A new spasm of fear gripped the sailor. He felt that any minute now his heart would burst and he would go to the bottom. He wanted to cry out but he could not unclench his teeth.

Suddenly he heard the soft splash of oars. A few moments later he saw the black silhouette of a boat.

He mustered all his strength and struck out after the boat, thrashing his feet desperately. He caught up with it and succeeded in grabbing hold of its high stern.

Hand over hand he managed somehow to pull himself to the boat's side, which was lower, and with an effort he looked in; the boat tilted.

"Come now, none of your tricks!" Gavrik shouted in a threatening bass when he saw the wet head sticking out over the gunwale.

The boy was not at all surprised to see the head. Odessa was famous for its swimmers.

Some swam out as far as three or four miles from shore and returned late in the evening. This was probably one of them.

If he was such a hero he had no business catching hold of people's boats for a rest. He ought to keep right on swimming. They'd put in a good day's work and were tired enough as it is, without dragging him!

"Come now, stop fooling! Push off or I'll let you have it with this oar!"

To give more weight to his words he bent over as if to take the oar out of the rowlock, exactly the way Grandpa did on such occasions.

"I'm—ill—" the head said, panting.

Over the side stretched a trembling arm to which the sleeve of an embroidered shirt was plastered.

This, Gavrik saw at once, was not a swimmer: people didn't go swimming in the sea in embroidered shirts.

"What's the matter—your boat sink?"

The sailor was silent. His head and arms hung lifelessly inside the boat while his legs, clad in drawers, dragged in the water. He had fainted.

Gavrik and Grandpa dropped their oars and with difficulty pulled the limp but frightfully heavy body into the boat.

"How hot he is!" said Grandpa, catching his breath.

Although the sailor was wet and shivering, his whole body burned with a dry, unhealthy heat.

"Want a drink?" asked Gavrik.

The sailor did not reply. He merely rolled his glazed, unseeing eyes and stirred his swollen lips.

The boy offered him the water-keg. He pushed it aside weakly and swallowed his saliva in revulsion. A second later he vomited.

His head fell and banged against the thwart.

Then, like a blind man, he reached out in the darkness for the keg, found it and, his teeth chattering against the oaken side, managed to gulp down some water.

Grandpa shook his head. "A bad business!"

"Where are you from?" asked the boy.

Again the sailor swallowed his saliva. He tried to say something but only managed to stretch out his arm and then dropped it lifelessly.

"To the devil with him!" he muttered indistinctly. "Don't let anybody see me. I'm a sailor—hide me somewhere—or else they'll hang me—it's the truth, so help me God—by the true and holy—"

He evidently wanted to make the sign of the Cross but couldn't raise his hand. He tried to smile at his weakness but instead a film passed over his eyes.

Again he lost consciousness.

Grandfather and grandson exchanged glances but neither said a word.

Times were such that keeping mum was the best policy.

They carefully laid the sailor on the floor-slats, through which unbailed water splashed up, placed the keg under his head and sat down at the oars.

They rowed slowly, idling along so as to reach shore when it was altogether dark. The darker the better. Before landing they circled about for a while near the familiar crags.

Fortunately, there was no one on the shore.

It was a warm, dark night full of stars and crickets.

Grandfather and grandson pulled the boat up on the beach. The pebbles rustled mysteriously.

While Grandpa remained behind to guard the sick man Gavrik ran ahead to make certain the coast was clear.

He soon returned. From his soundless footsteps, Grandpa gathered that all was well. With great difficulty, but gently, they pulled the sailor out of the boat and stood him on his legs, propping him from both sides.

The sailor put his arm round Gavrik's neck and pressed him to his now dry and extraordinarily hot body. He did not realise, of course, how heavily he was leaning on the boy.

Gavrik braced his legs more firmly. "Can you walk?" he asked in a whisper.

The sailor did not reply but took a few swaying steps forward, like a sleepwalker.

"Easy does it, easy does it," urged Grandpa, supporting the sailor from behind.

"It's not far. Only a couple of steps."

They finally made their way up the little hill. No one saw them. And even if anyone had, he would hardly have paid any attention to that reeling white figure supported by an old man and a boy.

It was a familiar enough scene: a drunken fisherman was being led home by his relatives, and if he wasn't swearing or bawling songs that was simply because he had taken too much.

The minute they got the sailor into the hot and smelly darkness of the hut he collapsed on the plank-bed.

Grandpa covered the tiny window with a piece of plywood from a broken box and closed the door tightly. Only then did he light the small, chimneyless paraffin lamp, turning down the wick as low as possible.

The lamp stood in the corner, on a shelf covered with an old newspaper.

On the same shelf lay the army bread wrapped in a damp rag to keep it fresh, a cup made out of a tin can, the soldiers' porridge in a tin bowl, two wooden spoons, and a big blue seashell with coarse grey salt in it—in a word, a poverty-stricken but neat household array.

An old smoke-blackened icon was nailed in the corner above the shelf: an oblong coffee-coloured stain that was the face of St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker—the protector of fishermen—looked down with glittering eyes painted in the manner of the old Kiev school.

A wisp of smoke and the lamp-light streamed up the ancient face from below. It seemed to be alive, to be breathing.

For a long time now Grandpa had believed in neither God nor the devil. He had not seen them bring either good or evil into his life. But in St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker he did believe.

How could he not believe in this saint who helped him in his difficult and dangerous occupation? Especially since this occupation, fishing, was the most Important thing in Grandpa's life.

But lately, to tell the truth, the miracle worker had been falling down on the job.

When Grandpa was younger and stronger, when he had had good tackle and a sail, the miracle worker had been of some use.

But the older Grandpa became the less help did he get from his patron saint.

Of course, when there was no sail, when the old man's strength was waning from day to day, and when there was no money to buy meat for bait, the fish caught would be small and good for nothing, be he the most miraculous miracle worker the world had ever

seen. And so there was no sense expecting anything of him.

Yes, even the miracle worker was stumped when it came to offsetting old age and poverty.

For all that, there were times when Grandpa felt bitter and hurt as he looked at the stern but useless saint. True, he was no expense and hung there in his corner without disturbing anybody. Oh well, let him hang there: perhaps he'd do a good turn some day. In time the old man had come to take a patronising and even somewhat ironical attitude towards the miracle worker.

Returning to the hut with a catch—and the catch these days was almost always pitifully small—Grandpa would grumble, looking at the embarrassed miracle worker out of the corner of his eye, "Well, you old codger, so we're empty-handed again, eh? This is such trash it makes me blush to take it to market. They're not bullheads but lice."

Then, so as not to hurt the saint's feelings too much, he would add, "It's only natural. Would a real big bullhead ever go for shrimps? A real, well-fed bullhead's ready to spit on a shrimp. What a real, well-fed bullhead wants is meat. But where'll we get it, eh? You can't buy meat with a miracle, can you? So you see?"

Now, however, the miracle worker was farthest from the old man's thoughts. He was greatly worried about the sailor. And not so much by his fever and

unconsciousness as by his premonition of mortal danger from some unnamed source.

Naturally, Grandpa did have an idea of what it was all about, but to help the man he would have to know a little more.

As luck would have it, however, the sailor was unconscious and feverish; he lay sprawled out on the patchwork quilt, staring straight in front of him with open but unseeing eyes.

One of his hands hung down from the bed. On the other, which lay on his chest, Grandpa saw a blue anchor.

Every now and then the sailor attempted to spring up; moaning, the hot sweat pouring from him, unconscious, he would bite his hand as though trying to bite out the anchor, as if once the anchor were gone he would instantly feel better.

Grandpa forced him to lie down again and wiped his forehead. "Lie down, now," he urged. "Lie quiet, I tell you. And go to sleep, don't be afraid. Go to sleep."

Out in the vegetable patch Gavrik was boiling water in a cauldron to make the sick man some tea. Not real tea, that is, but a brew of the fragrant herb which Grandpa gathered in the nearby hills in May, and then dried and used instead of tea.

16

"TURRET GUN, SHOOT!"

They passed a fitful night.

The sailor tore at the shirt on his chest. He was suffocating.

Grandpa put out the lamp and opened the door to let in fresh air.

The sailor saw the starry sky but he could not understand what it was. The night breeze blew into the hut and cooled his head.

Gavrik lay in the weeds near the door, his ears attuned to the faintest rustle. He did not close an eye until morning. His elbow turned numb from lying on it.

Grandpa made a bed for himself on the earthen floor of the hut but he did not sleep either; he listened to the crickets, to the waves and to the moans of the sick man, who from time to time sprang up excitedly and shouted in a weak, colourless voice, "Turret gun, shoot! Koshuba! Turret, give it to them!" and other such nonsense.

Grandpa would take him firmly by the shoulders, shake him gently and whisper straight into his hot, feverish mouth, "Lie quiet. For the sake of the Lord God himself, don't raise a row. Lie quiet. What a trial!"

Little by little the sailor, grinding his teeth, would quieten down.

Who was this strange patient?

Rodion Zhukov was one of the seven hundred men of the battleship *Potemkin* who had gone ashore in Rumania.

He in no way stood out among the other men of the mutinous ship.

From the first minute of the uprising, from that very minute when the commander of the battleship dropped in horror and despair to his knees before the crew, when the first rifle shots rang out and the dead bodies of certain officers were thrown overboard, when the sailor named Matyushenko ripped off the door of the Admiral's cabin, that very cabin past which they still could not walk without a feeling of fright—from that very minute Rodion Zhukov lived, thought, and acted as did most of the other sailors: in a sort of haze, in a state of feverish exaltation until the time when they had to surrender to the Rumanians and disembark at Constantsa.

Rodion had never before set foot in a foreign land. And a foreign land, like useless freedom, is broad and bitter.

The *Potemkin* stood quite close to the pier.

Among the feluccas, freighters, yawls, yachts and cutters, and side by side with an emaciated-looking Rumanian cruiser, the grey three-funnelled battleship was absurdly huge.

The flag of St. Andrew, like a white envelope crossed with blue lines, still hung aloft, above the gun-turrets, boats and yards.

But suddenly it quivered, fell limp, and slid down in short spurts.

Rodion then took off his sailor cap with both hands and bowed so low that the ends of the new ribbons of St. George spread out gently over the dust, like those orange-and-black country flowers.

"It's a dirty shame! Twelve-inch guns, enough ammunition to last a month, and crack gunners, every mother's son of them. We ought to have listened to Dorofei Koshuba. He was right when he said we ought to throw the lousy petty officers overboard, sink the *Georgi Pobedonosets* and land a force in Odessa. We would have roused the whole Odessa garrison, all the workers, the whole Black Sea! Oh, Koshuba, Koshuba, if only we'd listened to you! What a hell of a mess we're in!"

Rodion bowed to his beloved ship for the last time.

"Never mind," he said through his teeth, "never mind. We won't give in. We'll rouse the whole of Russia all the same!"

With his last money he bought a civilian outfit, and a few days later, at night, he reached Russian territory by crossing the estuary of the Danube near Vilkovo.

His plan was to make his way across the steppe to Akkerman, and then on a barge or a boat to Odessa. From Odessa it would be simple to reach his native village of Nerubaiskoye, and there he would decide his next move.

He knew only one thing for certain: that all the roads to the past were closed to him, that he was cut

off once and for all both from the servile life of a sailor on the tsar's battleship, and from the hard peasant life at home, in the clay hut with the dark-blue walls and the light-blue window-frames, standing among pink and yellow hollyhocks.

Now it was either the gallows or going into hiding, starting an uprising, setting fire to landowners' manors, reaching the city and locating the revolutionary headquarters.

He began to feel ill on the road but stopping was out of the question and he continued on his way.

And now.. . . What's the matter with him? Where is he? Why are stars rocking in the doorway? And are they really stars?

Like a dark sea, night engulfs Rodion.

The stars gather into clusters, flare up, and form a low-lying row of Quarantine lights before his eyes. The city breaks into commotion. The trestle bridge in the port bursts into flames. Running men lose their direction in the raging fire. Rifle volleys smack down on the roadway like long steel rails.

The night is a rocking ship's deck. The bright circle of a searchlight skims along the winding shore, making the corners of houses glow white-hot and windows glare dazzlingly; and out of the darkness it snatches the figures of running soldiers, ragged red flags, ammunition-wagons, gun-carriages, overturned horse-trams.

And then he sees himself in the gun-turret. The gunner glues his eye to the range-finder. The turret

revolves smoothly, bringing the empty, shining, mirror-like, grooved barrel to bear on the city. Stop! Now it is directly on a line with the blue cupola of the theatre where an imposing general is holding a war council against the insurgents.

The turret telephone buzzes faintly and monotonously.

Or can that be crickets in the steppe? No, it's the telephone. With a slow clang the electric hoist brings up a shell from the magazine. It sways on the chains and comes straight into Rodion's hands.

Or can that be a cool melon instead of a shell? Ah, what a joy to bite into a juicy melon! But no, it's a shell. "Turret, shoot!"

That very same instant there is a ringing in his ears, as if some giant hand outside has struck the armour of the turret like a tambourine. There is a flash of fire. The smell of a burning celluloid comb pours over him.

The entire breadth of the roadstead shudders. The boats begin to rock. A strip of iron comes down between the ship and the city. An "over".

Rodion's hands are flaming hot. Then again the crickets meander in a crystal stream among the close-set stars and the weeds.

Or can that chirping be the telephone? Now the second shell crawls out of the hoist and into Rodion's hands. Now we'll finish off that general! "Turret, shoot!"

"Lie down and stop your yelling. Want a drink? Lie quiet."

A second strip crosses the bay. Again an "over". But never mind, the third time we won't miss. And there are plenty of shells. A magazine full of them.

In his weary hands the third shell feels lighter than a feather and yet heavier than a house.

Fire it as quickly as possible, send smoke pouring out of that blue cupola—and then things'll roll along!

But why has the telephone stopped chirping, why have the crickets stopped tinkling? Have they all dropped dead there overhead?

Or is that the dawn, so quiet and so pink? Smoothly the turret turns back. "Cease firing!" The shell slips out of his lowered hands and is carried back into the magazine, with a rattle of the hoist chains. But no—the cup has slipped from his fingers and water is trickling slowly from the bed to the floor. And then all is quiet, oh, so quiet.

"What's this? They betrayed freedom, the damned swine! They turned cowards! Once you start fighting you've got to fight to the end! To leave not a single stone standing!"

"Shoot, turret gun, shoot!"

"Oh, Lord, oh, St. Nicholas, holy miracle worker! Lie down and drink some more water. What a misfortune!"

The pink quietness of dawn lays a tender and soothing hand on Rodion's inflamed cheek. Far away on the gilded bluff the cocks begin to crow.

17

THE OWNER OF THE SHOOTING GALLERY

After talking things over, grandfather and grandson decided not to show the sick man to anybody for the time being, let alone send him to the city hospital, where they would most certainly ask to see his papers.

In Grandpa's opinion the sailor had a plain, ordinary fever, and it would soon pass. Then it would be up to him to think of what to do next.

Meanwhile it had grown completely light. It was time to take the boat out again. The sick man no longer slept.

Weakened by his sweating during the night, he lay motionless on his back, looking up with conscious, attentive eyes at the icon of the miracle worker and the bunch of fresh cornflowers stuck behind its dark, time-warped board.

"Your head clear?" asked Grandpa, coming up to the bed.

The patient moved his lips as though trying to say "yes". "Feeling better?"

He dropped his eyelids in sign of affirmation. Grandpa glanced at the bread and porridge on the shelf. "Like something to eat?" The sailor shook his head weakly.

"Well, as you like. Listen, son. We have to go out in the boat for bullheads, understand? We'll leave you

here by yourself and lock the door. You can trust us. We're Black Sea folk, the same as you. Understand? You lie here nice and quiet. If anybody knocks, don't say a word. Gavrik and I'll do our work and then we'll come right back. I'm leaving you a cup of water. If you feel thirsty take a drink, it won't hurt you. And don't worry about anything at all. You can depend on us. Understand?"

The old man said "Understand?" after every other word, talking to the sailor as though he were a child.

The sailor forced a smile to his eyes, and from time to time he dropped his lids, as if to say, "Don't worry. I understand. Thanks."

The fishermen locked him in and went out in the boat. They returned four hours later to find everything in order. The patient was asleep.

This time they had had luck.

They had taken about three hundred and fifty fine big bullheads off the line. Grandpa gave the miracle worker a pleased look, chewed his wrinkled lips, and remarked, "Not bad. Not at all bad today. They're big ones, even though we did use shrimps. God bless you."

But the miracle worker, fully conscious of his powers, looked down at Grandpa sternly, haughtily even, as if he wanted to say, "And you doubted me, called me an old codger. You're the one who's an old codger."

Grandpa decided to take the bullheads to market himself. It was high time he had it out with Madam Storozhenko. After all, no matter how much fish he

brought her he always remained in debt and never saw any hard cash. In that case what was the use of fishing?

Today was just the day for that talk. With these select bullheads he could look her straight in the eye.

Naturally Gavrik would have liked to go along with him to market. Then, on the way back, he could see Petya and finally get a drink of *kvass* at the corner.

But leaving the sailor alone was risky because this was Sunday and a crowd of people would probably come down to the beach from the city.

Grandpa lifted the wet fish tank to his shoulder and shuffled off to market. Gavrik poured fresh water into the cup, covered the sailor's feet against the flies, hung the padlock on the door, and went out for a stroll. Not far away, on the beach, were various places of entertainment: a little restaurant with a garden and a skittle-alley, a shooting gallery, a merry-go-round, automatic dynamometers, stands where you could buy soda-water and Turkish delight—in short, a small fair-ground. The place was a real feast for the boy's eyes.

The morning service had not yet ended. The pealing of church bells floated above the bluffs.

And every now and then a snow-white cloud as round and bright as that sound of the bells was wafted across the sky by the breeze, although down at the beach no wind could be felt at all.

It was early for the real fun, but several well-dressed city people were hovering about the merry-go-round waiting for the canvas cover to be taken off.

From the skittle-alley came the slow, cast-iron rumbling of the heavy ball as it rolled down the narrow board. The ball rolled an awfully long time and its noise grew fainter and fainter until suddenly, after a short silence, the soft musical clink of scattered pins came through the yellow acacias growing by the fence.

Every once in a while a report resounded from the shooting gallery. Sometimes it would be followed by the crash of a broken bottle, or the whirr of a moving target.

The shooting gallery lured Gavrik irresistibly.

He walked over to it and stopped near the door. Greedily he breathed in the smell of gunpowder, a bluish-leaden smell like nothing else on earth. He could even feel its peculiar sourish and choky taste on his tongue.

And those guns, so tantalising in their special racks! The small butts, expertly made out of wood as heavy as iron, with a sharp network of lines cut into it on the places where you held it, so that your hand would not slip. The thick, long barrel of burnished blue steel with the small hole of the muzzle, no larger than a pea. The blue steel sight, and the bolt handle that moved up and down so smoothly and simply.

Even the very richest boys dreamed of owning a gun like that, a Monte Cristo. This was a word that made your heart miss a beat. It had an all-embracing meaning: fabulous wealth, happiness, glory, manliness. Owning a Monte Cristo was even more than having your own bicycle.

A boy who had a Monte Cristo was known far beyond the street in which he lived. And he was referred to in this way: "You know, the Volodka from Richelieu Street who has a Monte Cristo."

Gavrik, of course, could never dream of owning a Monte Cristo. Or even of firing one, for that was terribly dear: five kopeks a shot. You had to be awfully rich for that.

Gavrik could dream only of aiming from the wonderful gun. Occasionally the owner of the shooting gallery gave him that pleasure.

Now there was a visitor in the gallery, so it was out of the question. Perhaps when he left Gavrik would ask the owner, and then. . ..

But the visitor was in no hurry to leave. He stood there with his sandaled feet planted wide apart and instead of shooting was talking with the proprietor.

When the proprietor happened to glance his way, Gavrik greeted him respectfully, "Many happy returns of the day."

He acknowledged the greeting with a dignified nod, as became the owner of such an unusual place of amusement. That was a lucky sign. It meant he was in a good mood and might very well let you handle a Monte Cristo.

Encouraged, Gavrik came closer, right into the doorway.

With eager, admiring eyes he examined the pistols hanging above the counter, the branched rifle-support,

and the various mechanical targets, one of which appealed to him especially.

This was a Japanese battleship, with guns and a flag, riding the garish green waves of a tin sea. Out of the sea jutted a rod topped by a little metal circle, and if you hit that circle the battleship broke in two with a bang and went to the bottom, a fan-shaped tin geyser rising in its place.

Naturally, among the hares with the drums, the ballet dancers, the anglers with a shoe at the end of their line, and the bottles moving along one after another on an endless belt, the Japanese battleship held first place both for the brilliance of its idea and its superb execution.

Everybody knew that only a short while ago the Japanese had sent the whole Russian fleet to the bottom at Tsushima, and there were always visitors who thirsted for revenge on the "Japs".

The gallery had, besides, a real fountain. It was set going only when a visitor asked for it. A celluloid ball put on top of the jet by the proprietor would be flung up and turned round, then suddenly dropped and just as suddenly lifted. This was a real miracle, a mystery of nature. To hit that ball was one of the hardest things in the world. Sometimes men got so excited they shot at it ten or fifteen times, and almost always they missed.

But whoever did hit the ball was entitled to an extra shot free of charge.

"So you say nothing unusual happened here yesterday evening?" the visitor remarked, continuing the conversation. He was toying with a beautiful gun; in his huge paws it seemed tiny.

"Not as far as I know." "Hm."

The man ran his eye over the targets. He took off his blue pince-nez, which left two coral dents on his fleshy nose, and aimed at a hare holding a drum. But then he changed his mind and lowered the gun.

"Didn't any of the fishermen hereabouts mention anything?"

"Not a thing."

"Hm."

The visitor picked up the Monte Cristo, then lowered it again.

"I heard, though, that a man fell off the *Turgenev* yesterday evening, opposite the shore here. Heard anything about that?" "Not a thing."

Gavrik caught his breath sharply. He felt as though a bucket of ice-cold water had been poured over him. His heart contracted so that he could no longer hear it. His legs grew limp. He was afraid to move.

"I heard that a man jumped off the steamer, a man the police are looking for. Just opposite the shore here. Know anything about it?"

"This is the first I've heard of it."

The owner of the shooting gallery was clearly bored to death by this moustached gossip.

His expression was courteous and dignified, but he was on the verge of yawning, and he twirled a little

green box of cartridges in his fingers. He thought, and rightly so, that if a man came to shoot he ought to shoot. And if he wanted to have a chat, that was all right too—but in between shots. A chat on some interesting topic, naturally, like the races at the velodrome or the Russo-Japanese war.

Deathly boredom was written all over his seedy face, the face of a failure, racked by secret passions.

Gavrik felt sorry for him from the bottom of his heart. Like all the other children, he was for some reason very fond of this man with slanting side-whiskers, legs as bowed as a dachshund's, and a hairy, heavily tattooed chest showing through his thin undershirt.

Gavrik knew that although the man made quite a decent living he never had a kopek to his name. He was always in debt, was always very worried about something. Rumour had it that he used to be a famous circus rider, and that once he had struck the owner of the circus across the face with his whip for having done something mean. He was sacked and black-listed. Deprived of his livelihood, he took to betting at the horse-races, and this was his downfall. Now he played at all games of chance; even at pitching coins with little boys.

He was eternally in the grip of a frightful gambling fever.

It was a known fact that at times he gambled away the clothes he wore. The shoes he had on, for example, did not belong to him. He had lost them at the

beginning of the summer playing twenty-one, and now when he closed his place for the night he went home barefoot, carrying under his arm a box with the rifles and pistols; afraid of gambling them away, he left them for safekeeping until the morning with a janitor acquaintance of his in Malaya Arnautskaya Street.

Once, on the beach, Gavrik himself had seen him bet a gentleman fifty kopeks that he could hit a sparrow on the fly from a Monte Cristo. Of course, he missed.

What followed was so pitiful that Gavrik felt like crying. With a shameful show of surprise the man examined the gun for a long time, then shrugged his shoulders and reached inside his mended jacket. His face was pale. He brought out a fifty-kopek piece and handed it to the gentleman. The gentleman laughingly protested that it had all been in fun. But the proprietor of the shooting gallery suddenly looked at him with such insane, pathetic and at the same time ominously bloodshot eyes that the gentleman quickly took the coin, and, embarrassed, put it in the pocket of his pongee jacket.

That day the shooting gallery did not close for dinner.

"If I were you, sir, I'd try a shot at the ballet dancer and see how saucily she kicks up her legs," said the proprietor in his Polish accent. He clearly wanted to put an end to the boring conversation and get the visitor to shoot.

"It's strange, though, that no one knows anything about it," the latter said.

Just then he noticed Gavrik. He gave him a quick glance from head to foot.

"Do you live here, son?"

"Yes," said the boy. His voice was unusually thin.

"Your people fishermen?"

"Yes."

"Why so shy? Come closer, don't be afraid."

Gavrik looked at the coarse, tightly-twirled moustache which was as black as boot-polish, at the long strip of adhesive plaster across the cheek, and, terrified, approached the man, mechanically putting one foot in front of the other.

18

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"Your father and mother alive?" "No."

"Then who do you live with?" "Grandpa." "Who's he?" "An old man."

"Naturally—but what does he do for a living?" "He catches fish." "A fisherman, eh?" "Yes, a fisher." "And what are you?" "A boy."

"I can see you're a boy and not a girl. What I'm asking you is what do you do?"

"Oh, nothing. I help Grandpa."

"That means you go out fishing together, eh?"

"Uh-huh."

"I see. Well, then, how do you fish?"

"Why, we just put out the line for the night, and the next morning we pull out the bullheads."

"That means you go out to sea in a boat, doesn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Every day?"

"What's that?"

"What a little blockhead you are! What I'm asking you is this: do you go out in the boat every day?"

" 'Course we do."

"Morning and evening?"

"No."

"How's that?"

"Only mornings."

"What about the evening?"

"Well, evenings too."

"Then why do you say only mornings when it's evenings too?"

"No. Evenings we only put out the line. We pull out the bullheads in the morning."

"I see. That means you go out evenings too."

"No. Evenings we only put it out."

"For God's sake! But to put it out don't you have to go out to sea first?"

"Course we do. "

"That means you go out evenings too, doesn't it?"

"No, evenings we don't pull out. We only pull out mornings."

"But in the evening you go out to put out the line, don't you?"

" 'Course we do."

"That means you go out evenings too, doesn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

"What a little blockhead you are! A man has to have a good meal under his belt before he tries talking to you. What makes you so stupid?"

"I'm only a kid."

With an unconcealed sneer the moustached gentleman surveyed Gavrik from top to toe and then gave him a fillip—quite a smart one—on the head.

"A fine fisherman *you* are!"

But the boy was by no means a blockhead.

He had immediately sensed a sly and dangerous enemy in this man with the moustaches. There he was, wandering along the shore asking questions about the sailor. He was only making believe he'd come in here to shoot. Who could tell what he really was after? Most likely he was a detective. Why, he might even find out somehow that the runaway was hiding in their hut! Perhaps—God forbid!— he had found it out already.

Gavrik had decided at once to act the fool. You couldn't learn much from a fool.

He twisted his face into the stupid expression he thought a little half-wit should wear; he goggled his eyes, shifted from foot to foot with exaggerated embarrassment, and picked at a sore on his lip.

When he saw he was dealing with a hopeless idiot, Moustaches thought it best to make friends with him first and pump him afterwards.

He reasoned, not without foundation, that children were an inquisitive and observant lot and knew more than grown-ups about what was going on around them.

"What's your name, sonny?"

"Gavrik."

"Well, look here, Gavrik, would you like to shoot?"

A warm flush coloured the boy's face to the very tips of his ears. He instantly collected himself, however. "But I've no money," he said in a thin, squeaky voice, playing the fool.

"I know that, but it doesn't matter. You can take a shot. I'll pay."

"You're not making fun of me?"

"Don't trust me? Well, look."

With these words Moustaches laid a big brand-new five-kopek piece on the counter.

"Shoot away."

Gavrik, overcome with happiness, looked in indecision at the proprietor. But the latter's face had taken on such a strictly formal expression that an exchange of friendly winks was obviously out of the question.

He looked at the boy as if he had never seen him before, and, leaning respectfully over the counter, said, "Which would you prefer to use, young man? A pistol or a rifle?"

Gavrik was so bowled over by unexpected happiness that he really did feel like a half-wit now.

"A Monte Cristo," he stammered, a silly grin on his face.

With a flourish the proprietor loaded the gun and handed it to the boy.

Breathing heavily, he glued himself to the counter and aimed at a bottle. The Japanese battleship appealed to him much more, of course, but he was afraid of missing. The bottle was a big one.

He tried to prolong the pleasure of aiming as much as possible.

After aiming at the bottle for a while he shifted to a hare, then to the battleship, and then back to the bottle. He moved the sight from one bull's-eye to another, swallowing his saliva and thinking in horror that the moment he fired, the bliss would come to an end.

Finally he took a deep breath and put the rifle down. "You know what," he said to Moustaches, with a guilty look at the proprietor, "I think I won't. I aimed, and that's almost as good. Treat me instead to a drink of soda water with syrup at the stand. Besides, it'll cost you less."

Moustaches had no objections. Making an effort not to look at the proprietor, whose expression was a mixture of contempt and ironic indifference, they set out for the stand.

There Moustaches displayed such generosity that the boy could only gasp. Instead of water and syrup,

which cost two kopeks, he ordered nothing less than a whole big bottle of Violet Soda, costing eight kopeks.

Gavrik could not believe his eyes when the stand-keeper brought out the white bottle with the violet label and unwound the thin wire round the cork.

The bottle popped. Not in the coarse way *kvass* bottles popped, but gently, with style. The clear water immediately began to foam, and out of the mouth of the bottle there poured a gas which actually did give off the delicate fragrance of real violets.

Gavrik carefully picked up the cold bubbling glass with both hands, as if it were a treasure, and, squinting against the sun, began to drink. He could feel the sweet-smelling gas shooting up into his nose from his throat.

As he swallowed this magic nectar of the wealthy, he felt that the whole universe was gazing upon him in this moment of triumph: the sun, the clouds, the sea, people, dogs, cyclists, the wooden horses of the merry-go-round, the girl who sold tickets at the municipal bathing beach. And they were all saying, "Look, look, that boy is drinking Violet Soda!"

A little turquoise lizard had popped out of the weeds to warm its beady back in the sun, and as it clung to a rock with one paw it squinted up at him as if it, too, were saying, "Look, isn't he a lucky boy to be drinking Violet Soda!"

While he drank Gavrik pondered on how to wriggle out of any further questions Moustaches might ask him. He thought up a whole plan.

"Well, Gavrik, like the Violet Soda?"

"Thanks. Never tasted anything so good in all my life."

"I should think so. Now tell me, did you go out to sea yesterday evening?"

"Uh-huh."

"Did you see the *Turgenev?"*

" 'Course! She almost ripped our line to pieces with her wheels."

"A man didn't jump from the ship, did he?"

Moustaches fixed his bushy black eyes on the boy. Gavrik forced his mouth into a grin. "So help me God, a man did jump off!" he said with exaggerated excitement. "May I drop dead on the spot! Bango!—right into the water, and what a splash! And how he swam!"

"Wait a minute. Not making anything up, are you? Which way did he swim?"

"So help me God I'm not! By the true and holy Cross!"

Although Gavrik knew it was a sin, he quickly crossed himself four times.

"And then he swam and swam—"

The boy waved his arms to show how the sailor had swum.

"Which way?"

"That way." The boy waved his arm in the direction of the sea.

"And what happened to him after that?"

"After that a boat picked him up."

"A boat? What kind?"

"You know, a big one, a great big Ochakov boat with a sail."

"From hereabouts?"

"No."

"Then where from?"

"From Bolshoi Fontan. Or maybe from Lustdorf. All painted blue, and half red. A great big one. It picked him up and after that it headed straight for Lustdorf. By the true and holy—"

"Did you notice the boat's name?"

" 'Course I did: *Sonya."*

"Sonya, eh? That's fine. Not lying, are you?"

"By the true and holy Cross! May I never be happy in all my life! It was *Sonya,* or else *Vera."*

"Sonya or *Vera?"*

"Either *Sonya* or *Vera*—or else *Nadya."*

"If you're lying—"

Instead of paying for the drinks, Moustaches whispered something into the stand-keeper's ear, something that instantly made his expression turn sour. Then he nodded to the boy and hurriedly set out for the hill, obviously to take the suburban train to town.

That was just what Gavrik had expected him to do.

19

A POUND AND A HALF OF RYE BREAD

The sailor had to be warned immediately.

But Gavrik was a smart and cautious boy, and before returning home he followed Moustaches from a distance until with his own eyes he saw him climb the hill and turn down the lane.

Only then did he run back to the hut.

The sailor was asleep, but at the click of the padlock he sprang to his feet and then sat down on the bed, looking at the door with glittering, frightened eyes.

"Don't be afraid, it's me. Lie down."

The sick man lay down again.

The boy pottered about a long time in the corner, pretending to examine the hooks of the line, which was folded inside a round wicker basket. He did not know how to begin so as not to excite the sick man too much.

Finally he came up to the bed and stood there for a while, scratching one foot with the other.

"Feel better?"

"Yes."

"Your head clear?"

"Yes."

"Hungry?"

This conversation, brief though it was, completely exhausted the sailor. He shook his head and closed his eyes. The boy let him rest.

After a while he spoke again. "Listen," he said affectionately, in a low but persistent voice, "was it you jumped from the *Turgenev* yesterday?"

The sick man opened his eyes and looked up at the boy very intently, but made no reply.

"Listen to what I'm going to say," Gavrik whispered, sitting down on the bed. "Only lie quiet and don't get excited."

Then, as circumspectly as he could, he told the sailor about his acquaintance with the moustached man.

Again the sailor sprang to his feet and sat down on the bed, gripping the edge of it to hold himself erect. He stared at the boy with round, motionless eyes. His forehead had become damp. But he did not say a word. Only once did he break his silence. That was when Gavrik mentioned the adhesive plaster on Moustaches' cheek.

At this point of the story a mischievous, devil-may-care Ukrainian twinkle flickered in the sick man's eyes, and he said hoarsely, through his teeth, "A cat must have scratched him."

Suddenly he began to fidget, and then, steadying himself against the wall, he stood up on his shaky legs.

"Come on," he muttered, looking round wildly. "Come on, let's go somewhere. For Christ's sake!" "Get back in bed, uncle, you're sick." "Come on . . . give me my kit. Where's my kit?" He had evidently forgotten that he had thrown off his clothes in the sea. His thin hand fumbled helplessly about the bed. Unshaven, in a white undershirt and drawers, he looked like a madman.

His appearance was so pathetic, but at the same time so ominous that Gavrik nearly ran away in fright.

He fought down his fear, however. He put his arms round the sick man's waist and tried to force him to lie down. "It's for your own good. Lie down, it's for your own good," he said, almost crying.

"Hands off. I'm going now."

"But how can you go anywhere in your drawers?"

"Give me my kit."

"What are you talking about? What kit? You didn't have any. Now lie quiet."

"Let me go."

"If you only knew what an awful nuisance you are! You're just like a baby. Lie down, I tell you!" the boy suddenly cried out in anger, losing his patience. "Stop acting like a baby!"

The sailor lay back submissively, and Gavrik saw a feverish glaze come into his eyes again. The sailor began to moan softly, screwing up his face and arching his back.

"For Christ's sake! Let somebody hide me. Let me go to the Committee. Can you tell me where the Odessa Committee is? Don't shoot, damn you, or you'll spoil all the grapes—"

He began to rave.

"Things are in a bad way," thought Gavrik. Just then he heard footsteps outside. Someone was coming straight to the hut, noisily making his way through the weeds.

The boy hunched his shoulders, not daring to breathe. A host of terrifying thoughts raced through his head.

But then suddenly he heard a familiar cough. Grandpa entered the hut.

From the way he dropped the empty fish tank near the door, from the way he blew his nose and crossed himself long and bitterly as he looked at the icon of the miracle worker, Gavrik unerringly guessed that he had had a drink.

This was something Grandpa did only once in a blue moon, when something out of the ordinary happened— whether good or bad.

Judging by his attitude towards St. Nicholas, the occasion this time was sooner bad than good.

"Well, Grandpa, buy meat for bait?"

"Meat for bait?"

The old man gave the boy a guileless look and then held a figged thumb under his nose.

"Here's your meat! Bait it! And thank that old codger of a miracle worker for it. That's what I get for praying to that old fool, may he burst! When it comes to catching big-sized bullheads he's on the spot, but when it comes to getting a decent price for them at the market he's nowhere to be found! Can you imagine, gentlemen? Thirty kopeks a hundred for bullheads like that! It's unheard-of!"

"Thirty kopeks a hundred!" the boy exclaimed.

"Thirty kopeks, may I drop dead on the spot! Thirty kopeks for fish like this?' I says to her. 'Ain't you got

no fear of God, Madam Storozhenko?' 'God's got nothing to do with market prices,' she says to me. 'We've got our own prices and he's got his. And if you don't like my price you can take your bullheads and sell them to the Jews. Maybe they'll give you a kopek more. Only first pay me back the eighty kopeks you owe me.' Ever seen the like? Now tell me, shouldn't I have spit straight in her damned eye for that? Well, gentlemen, that's just what I did. Right in front of the whole market, too! So help me God, I filled her eye with spit!"

Grandpa hurriedly crossed himself.

But he was not telling the truth. Naturally, he had not spat in anybody's eye. He had merely turned pale and begun to tremble from head to foot, and then he had pulled the fish out of the tank and thrown them into Madam Storozhenko's basket, muttering, "Here, take 'em, and I hope they choke you!"

As for Madam Storozhenko, she calmly counted the fish and handed Grandpa twelve kopeks in sticky coppers. "Now we're quits," she said briefly.

Grandpa took the money and, boiling with futile rage, went straight to a spirits shop where he bought himself a bottle of vodka. He scraped off the red sealing-wax against the grater nailed for the purpose to an acacia tree near the shop, and then with a shaking hand knocked out the little paper-wrapped cork.

He poured the vodka down his throat in one go and smashed the thin bottle against the pavement, although he could have got a kopek for it.

After that he set out for home. On the way he bought his grandson a red lollipop in the shape of a cock for a kopek—he still imagined Gavrik to be a little boy—and two very white and very sour rolls for the sick sailor.

With the remaining money he bought a pound and a half of rye bread.

His anger flared up again and again on the way home, and he stopped about a dozen times to spit furiously this way and that, absolutely convinced that he was spitting in Madam Storozhenko's accursed eye.

"So help me God!" he said, breathing the sweetish odour of vodka straight into Gavrik's face and putting the lollipop cock into his hand. "Ask anybody you like at the market—the whole market saw me spit into her damned eye! And now, my child, suck this lollipop. It's just as good as cake."

At this point the old man remembered the patient and began to urge the rolls on him.

"Let him be, Grandpa. He just fell asleep. Let him rest."

Grandpa carefully laid the rolls on the pillow beside the sailor's head and said in a whisper, "Shh, shh. Let him rest now. And later, when he wakes up, he'll eat. He can't eat the rye bread because his stomach is very weak now, but the rolls are all right for him."

The old man looked down affectionately at the rolls and at the patient, then shook his head and remarked in a gentle voice, "Look how peacefully he sleeps. Ah, sailor, sailor, you're in a tight spot."

Then he spread out his jacket in the corner and lay down to rest.

Gavrik went outside, looked round, and closed the door firmly after him. He had decided to go, without wasting a minute, to Near Mills to see his brother Terenti.

This decision had come to him the moment he heard the delirious sailor pronounce the word "Committee". Gavrik did not know exactly what this word meant, but he had once heard Terenti use it.

20

MORNING

When Petya woke up, he was amazed to find himself in his city room, surrounded by furniture and wallpaper he had forgotten during the summer.

A dry sunbeam coming through a crack in the shutter pierced the room. It cut a diagonal swath through the dusty air from top to bottom. The sawdusty air—motes of dust and tiny threads and hairs, moving and yet motionless—was brightly lit by the sunbeam and formed a semi-transparent wall.

A big autumn fly blazed into colour as it flew through this wall, and then it just as suddenly became drab again.

There was neither the quack of ducks nor the hysterics of a hen that had just laid an egg behind the house, neither the silly chatter of turkeys nor the fresh chirp of a sparrow, swaying almost inside the window on a thin mulberry branch bent in an arch under its weight.

The noises both inside and outside the flat were altogether different: they were city noises.

From the dining-room came the faint clatter of chairs being moved. There was a musical sound—the singing of a glass as it was washed in the rinsing-bowl. Father's "bearded" voice rang out, with a deep and strange city note to it. The buzz of the electric bell

filled the hall. Doors were slammed, now the front door, now the kitchen door, and suddenly Petya discovered that he could tell from the sound which one it was.

Meanwhile from outside, through a room with a window facing the yard—why, of course, that was Auntie Tatyana's room!—came the singing of the hawkers. Not for a minute did it cease, for they made their appearance one after the other, those roving artists of the courtyard stage, each performing his brief aria.

"Cha-a-arcoal! Cha-a-arcoal!" sang a distant Russian tenor, as if sadly recalling the gay, carefree days of long ago.

"Cha-a-a-arcoal!"

His place was taken by a comic basso—the grinder:

"Sharpen knives, scissors, razors! Sharpen knives, scissors, razors! Knives, scissors, razors!"

After the grinder came a tinker, filling the yard with the manly roulades of his velvety baritone:

"Pots to mend! Kettles and pails to mend!"

A hucksteress with no gift for singing at all ran into the yard, and the sultry morning air of the city resounded with her burring recitative:

"Pears, apples, tomatoes! Pears, apples, tomatoes!"

An old-clothes man poured out plaintive Jewish couplets:

"I cash clothes! I cash . . . I cash. . .."

Finally, to crown the concert, came a lovely Neapolitan canzonet performed by a brand-new Nechada barrel-organ and a shrill-voiced street singer:

The leaves in the wind softly sigh,
Hark to the nightingale's trills!
My love was once simple and shy,
But today she parades in silk frills.
Sing to me,
O dove,
Of my departed love....

"Cha-a-arcoal! Cha-a-arcoal!" sang the Russian tenor the minute the barrel-organ went away. The concert had begun all over again.

Meanwhile the clatter of droshkies, the rumble of a suburban train and the blare of an army band came from the street proper.

Into that din there suddenly broke a frightfully familiar whirring noise, a click and then clear, springy sounds, coming distinctly one after the other, as though counting something. What could that be? Why, that was the clock! The very same dining-room clock which, according to family legend, Daddy had won in a lottery when he was courting Mummy.

And to think that he had forgotten it! Why, of course, that was the clock! It was striking the hour. He lost count, but he gathered nevertheless that it was very late—ten or eleven.

Goodness! In the country he used to get up at seven!

Petya sprang out of bed, threw on his clothes, washed himself—in a bathroom!—and walked into the dining-room, squinting against the sun which lay on the parquet in hot bars.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" exclaimed Auntie, shaking her head and at the same time smiling with pleasure at the sight of her tall, sunburned nephew. "It's eleven o'clock. We purposely didn't wake you—we wanted to see how long you'd lounge in bed, you country loafer. But that's all right, after your long journey. And now sit down, don't dawdle. With milk or without? In a glass or in your own cup?"

Why, naturally! How had he ever forgotten? *His* cup! Why, of course, he had his own cup, a porcelain cup with forget-me-nots and an inscription in gold letters, "Happy Birthday"—last year's gift from Dunya.

And look—the samovar! That, too, he had forgotten. And there were the buns warming on its handles. The pear-shaped sugar bowl of white metal. The sugar tongs in the shape of a stork.

Look—there was the acorn bell on a cord under the hanging lamp! And the lamp itself, with the round little counterweight, filled with shot, above the white shade!

And look—what was that in Father's hands? Why, a newspaper! And to think he'd forgotten such things existed! It was the *Odessky Listok*, with the picture of a smoking locomotive above the railway timetable, and a smoking ship above the boat timetable. (And among

the ads, a lady in a corset!) And here were the *Niva* and *Zadushevnoye Slovo*. How many magazines had piled up during the summer!

In a word, Petya found himself surrounded by such a host of old novelties that he didn't know where to look first.

Pavlik, though, had got up at the crack of dawn and by now was fully at home in the new-old surroundings. He had long since drunk his milk, and at the moment was busy harnessing Kudlatka to a coach made up of chairs.

Every now and then he ran from room to room with a worried look on his face, blowing his horn to summon the imaginary passengers.

Petya jumped to his feet: he had remembered!

"Oh, Auntie! Yesterday I didn't have time to tell you! You simply can't imagine what happened. Now I'll tell you the story—only Pavlik, you mustn't interrupt."

"But I know all about it."

Petya turned pale.

"About the coach?"

"Yes."

"The boat too?"

"Yes."

"And how he jumped straight into the sea?"

"I know the whole story."

"Who told you?"

"Father."

"Oh, Daddy!" Petya cried out in despair, stamping his feet. "Why did you tell the story when you know I

can tell it much better than you! Now you've spoiled it all!"

Petya was almost crying. He had completely forgotten that he was a big boy now, and was to go to school the next day.

He began to whine. "Auntie Tatyana, do let me tell you the story all over again. I'll tell it much better."

But Auntie's nose suddenly turned red and tears came to her eyes. She pressed her fingers to her temples. "Oh please, please, don't," she said in a suffering voice. "I simply can't bear to hear it again. How can people who call themselves Christians have the heart to torture one another so?"

She turned away, dabbing at her nose with a tiny lace handkerchief.

Petya glanced in fright at Father. Father sat very grave and very still, looking towards the window. Tears seemed to be glistening in his eyes, too.

Petya couldn't make head or tail of it. All he did know was that here, at least, he would not have a chance to tell the story of yesterday's adventures.

He gulped down his tea and went out into the yard in search of an audience.

The janitor listened to the story with galling indifference! "Well, what of it?" he remarked. "Worse things happen."

There was not another soul to whom he could tell the story. Nusya Kogan, the shopkeeper's boy, who lived in the same house, was away on a visit to his uncle at Kuyalnitsky Bay. Volodka Dibsky had moved

away. The others had not yet returned from the country.

Gavrik had left a message with Dunya that he would drop in today, but there was no sign of him yet. Gavrik was the one to tell the story to! What if he went to the beach to look up Gavrik?

Petya was not allowed to go to the beach by himself, but the temptation was too great.

He shoved his hands into his pockets, circled about nonchalantly under the windows, and then sauntered out into the street with the same nonchalance, so as not to arouse any suspicion. After walking up and down in front of the house for appearance's sake, he turned the corner and set off at a gallop for the beach.

Halfway down the street where the warm sea baths stood, he ran into a barefoot boy. There was something familiar about him. . . . Who could he be?

It was Gavrik himself!

21

WORD OF HONOUR

"Gavrik!"

"Petya!"

It was with these brief exclamations of surprise and joy—and with nothing more—that the bosom friends greeted each other.

They did not hug each other, or squeeze each other's hands, or look into each other's eyes, as girls undoubtedly would have done in their place.

They did not ask about each other's health, or shout with glee, or make a fuss about it.

They acted the way men should, men of the Black Sea coast: they expressed their feelings in curt, restrained exclamations and then at once got down to essentials, as if they had parted only the day before.

"Where to?"

"To the beach. What about you?"

"To Near Mills, to my brother's."

"What for?"

"I have to. Want to come along?"

"Near Mills?"

"Why not?"

"Near Mills—"

Petya had never been in Near Mills. He knew only that it was awfully far away, "at the other end of the world".

In his imagination, Near Mills was a mournful place inhabited by widows and orphans. Its name always cropped up in connection with some misfortune or other.

The concept "Near Mills" was associated most frequently of all with a case of sudden death. People would say: "Have you heard the sad news? Angelika Ivanovna's husband died suddenly and left her without a kopek. She's given up her place in Marazlievskaya Street and gone to live in Near Mills."

From Near Mills there was no return. And if anybody ever did return from there, it was in the form of a shadow, and not for long—for an hour, no more.

People would say: "Yesterday Angelika Ivanovna—you know, the one whose husband died suddenly last year— came from Near Mills to pay us a visit. She stayed an hour, no more. You would hardly recognise her. A mere shadow—"

Once Petya had gone with Father to the funeral of a schoolmaster who had died suddenly, and at the grave the priest said words which filled him with awe—about an "abode of the righteous, where they will repose", or something of the sort.

There could not be the slightest doubt, of course, that "abode of the righteous" stood for Near Mills, where the relatives of the departed came somehow or other to "repose".

Petya had a vivid mental picture of this sad abode with its multitude of windmills among which "reposed" the shadows of widows in black shawls and orphans in patched frocks.

Naturally, going to Near Mills without permission was a dreadful thing to do. It was much worse than raiding the pantry for jam; worse, even, than bringing home a dead rat inside his shirt. It was a real crime.

Petya was dying to accompany Gavrik to the weird land of mournful windmills and see the shadows of widows with his own eyes, but he could not make up his mind right off.

The struggle with his conscience lasted about ten minutes.

But his waverings, need it be said, in no way prevented him from walking along the street at Gavrik's side and breathlessly recounting his travel adventures.

So that by the time Petya emerged victorious in the violent battle with his conscience—now a thoroughly crushed conscience—he and Gavrik had covered quite a distance.

Among the boys of the Black Sea coast, indifference towards everything under the sun was considered the height of good form. Petya was therefore astonished to see his story make a tremendous impression upon Gavrik. Not once did Gavrik spit contemptuously over his shoulder, not once did he say, "Tell it to your grandmother". Moreover, it seemed to Petya that Gavrik was a bit frightened—which he at once put down to his talent as a story-teller.

Enacting the terrifying scene, Petya turned red in the face.

"Then this one hauls off and slams him right in the mug with a stick with a nail in it!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "It's the honest truth! And then that one yells 'Stop! Stop!' so loud you can hear him all over the *Turgenev.* You can spit in my eye if I'm lying. And then this one jumps on the rail and dives right into the sea—plunk!—and the spray flies up as high as the fourth storey, may I fall down dead if it doesn't! By the true and holy Cross!"

So expressively did Petya jump about and swing his arms that he overturned a basket of string-beans in front of a grocer's shop, and they had to run two streets with their tongues hanging out to escape the proprietor.

"What was the first one like?" asked Gavrik. "Did he have an anchor on his hand?"

" 'Course he did!" Petya shouted excitedly, panting for breath.

"Here?" Gavrik pointed to the place on his hand.

" 'Course! But how do *you* know?"

"As if I've never seen sailors!" muttered Gavrik, and he spat on the ground just like a grown-up.

Petya looked at his friend with envy, and then he spat too. But he did not shoot out his spittle as expertly as Gavrik. Instead of flying a long way it dropped limply on his knee, and he had to wipe it off with his sleeve.

Petya decided to polish up on his spitting there and then. He practised so diligently all the way that the next morning his lips were chapped and eating melon was painful.

"What about the other one?" Gavrik asked. "Was he in sandals and did de wear glasses?"

"Pince-nez."

"Call 'em what you like."

"But how do you know?"

"As if I've never seen 'tecs!"

When he finished his story Petya wetted his lips with his tongue and started it all over again from the beginning without pausing to catch his breath.

Gavrik was going through unimaginable torments. Compared with what *he* knew, Petya's adventures weren't worth a fig! He'd just like to see Petya's face if he hinted that at this very moment the mysterious sailor was in their hut.

But he had to keep silent and listen to Petya's blabber for a second time. It was more than human flesh could bear.

What if he did drop a hint? Just a teeny one. No, no, not for anything! Petya would never keep it to himself. But suppose he made him give his word of honour? No, he'd let it out all the same. What if he made him cross himself in front of a church? Yes, in that case he probably wouldn't tell anybody.

In a word, Gavrik was torn by doubts.

The temptation was so great that every now and then he had to press his lips together with his fingers to keep from talking.

Nothing helped, however. He wanted more than ever to tell his secret. In the meantime, Petya rattled on, showing how the coach had been travelling, how the frightful sailor had jumped out of the vineyard and attacked the coachman, how he, Petya, had yelled at him, and how the sailor had hidden under the seat.

This was too much.

"Give me your word of honour you won't tell anybody!"

"Word of honour," said Petya quickly, without blinking an eye.

"Swear it!"

"So help me God, by the true and holy Cross! What is it?"

"It's a secret."

"Well?"

"You won't tell anybody?"

"May I never move from this spot if I do!"

"Swear by your happiness!"

"May I never be happy in all my life!" Petya said willingly. He was so curious he swallowed his saliva in big gulps. "May my eyes drop out of their sockets!" he added hurriedly, to give it more weight. "Well?"

Gavrik walked along in silence for a while, breathing heavily and spitting on the ground. The struggle with temptation was still going on inside him, and temptation was gaining the upper hand.

"Petya," he said hoarsely, "make the sign of the Cross in front of a church."

Petya, burning with impatience, looked round for a church.

The boys were at that moment walking past the limestone wall of Old Christian Cemetery. Along the wall sat vendors of wreaths and memorials, and over it could be seen the tops of old acacia trees and the marble wings of sorrowing angels.

(Near Mills must indeed be next door to death, if the road to it ran past a graveyard!)

In the dusty, pale-lilac sky, beyond the acacias and the angels, hung the blue cupola of the cemetery church, topped by a golden cross.

Petya faced the church and crossed himself fervently.

"By the true and holy Cross, I won't tell a soul!" he said with conviction. "Well?"

"Listen, Petya—"

Gavrik bit his lips and then began to chew the back of his hand. Tears stood in his eyes.

"Listen, Petya. Eat some earth to swear you won't tell!"

Petya studied the ground. Near the wall he saw earth that was fairly clean and looked suitable. He scratched some up with his fingernails. Then, sticking out a tongue as fresh and pink as boiled sausage, he placed a pinch of the earth on it. Eyes popping, he stared questioningly at Gavrik.

"Eat it!" Gavrik said darkly.

Petya closed his eyes tight and conscientiously chewed the earth.

At that instant they heard a strange clinking noise in the road.

Two soldiers with black shoulder straps, their swords bared, were leading a convict in chains. The third soldier of the escort detail walked behind, carrying a revolver and a thick delivery register with a marbled-paper cover. The convict wore a skull cap of army cloth and a robe of the same material, under which grey drawers were visible. He walked with his head bent.

The rattling leg-irons were covered by the drawers, but the long chain of the handcuffs hung in front and clinked as it beat against the man's knees.

From time to time he raised the chain, with the gesture of a priest raising the hem of his robe as he crosses a puddle. Clean-shaven and grey-faced, he looked somehow like a soldier or a sailor.

You could see he was very much ashamed at having to walk down the roadway in broad daylight in that condition. He kept his eyes on the ground.

The soldiers seemed ashamed too, but they angrily looked up instead of down, so as not to meet the eyes of the passers-by.

The boys stopped. They gaped at the visorless caps the soldiers wore tilted to one side, at their blue revolver cords, and at the gleaming white blades of the swords in their swinging hands. The sun made a dazzling glare on the tips of the swords.

"Keep moving," the soldier carrying the register gruffly ordered the boys, without looking at them. "Locking's not allowed."

The convict was led past.

Petya wiped his tongue on his sleeve. "Well?" he said.

"Well what?"

"Well, now tell me."

Suddenly Gavrik glared at Petya. Then he bent his arm with a fierce gesture and shoved his patched elbow under his friend's nose. "There, lick that!" Petya couldn't believe his eyes.

"But I ate earth!" he said, his lips trembling. He was nearly crying.

A wild, crafty gleam came into Gavrik's eyes. He squatted down and span round like a top, chanting in an insulting voice:

Fooled you once,

Fooled you twice.
Tell your Mum
I fooled you nice.

Petya saw that he had been tricked. Gavrik obviously had no secret to tell and had only wanted to poke fun at him by making him eat earth. That was insulting, of course, but bearable.

Next time he'd play a trick on Gavrik that would make him sorry. He'd see!

"Never mind, you skunk—I'll pay you back!" Petya remarked with dignity. After that the two friends continued on their way as though nothing had happened— except that every once in a while Gavrik would suddenly dance a jig on his bare heels and chant:

Fooled you once,
Fooled you twice.
Tell your Mum
I fooled you nice.

22

NEAR MILLS

They had a lot of fun on the way, and they saw many interesting things.

Petya had never imagined the city was so big. The unfamiliar streets gradually became poorer and poorer. Occasionally they passed shops with merchandise standing right on the pavement, under the acacias. There were cheap iron bedsteads, striped mattresses, kitchen stools, stacks of huge red pillows, besoms made of millet stalks, mops and upholstery springs. There was a great deal of everything, and it was all big, new, and obviously cheap.

Beyond the cemetery stretched firewood yards. They gave off a hot and somewhat sourish smell of oak, a smell which was surprisingly pleasant.

After that were fodder shops—oats, hay and bran—with uncommonly large scales on iron chains. The weights were huge—like those in the circus.

Next came timberyards where planks were seasoning. Here, too, there was a strong hot odour of sawn wood. This was pine, though, and instead of being sourish the smell was dry and fragrant and turpentinish.

It was easy to see that the closer they came to Near Mills the coarser and uglier everything round them was.

Gone were the elegant "Artificial Mineral Water Bars" with their gleaming nickel-plated whirligigs and jars of coloured syrup standing in rows. Their place was taken by food shops with blue signs—a herring on a fork—and taverns through whose open doors could be seen white egg-shaped tea-pots on shelves; the tea-pots were decorated with crude flowers which looked

more like vegetables. Instead of handsome droshkies, drays rumbled over the uneven roadway littered with hay and bran.

But as to finds, there were many more in this part of the city than in the familiar districts. Every now and then the boys came upon a horseshoe, or a screw, or an empty cigarette packet in the dust.

Whenever they spotted a find they raced for it, jostling and pushing each other as they ran.

"Halves!" they screamed.

Or, "Finding's keeping!"

Depending upon what had been shouted first the find was regarded, sacredly and inviolably, as either private property or held in common.

There were so many finds that at last they stopped picking them up, making an exception only in the case of cigarette packets.

These they needed for the game called "pictures". The packets had different values, depending upon the picture printed on the top. A picture of a man or woman counted for five, an animal for one, and a house for fifty.

Every Odessa boy was certain to have a deck of such packet tops in his pocket.

There was also a game with sweets wrappers, but this was played mostly by girls, and also by boys who were still babies, that is, who were under five.

Gavrik and Petya, of course, had long looked upon sweets wrappers with the greatest scorn. They played only with cigarette pasteboards.

For some reason or other Gipsies and Swallows were the favourite brands in the seaside districts.

What the smokers of the seaside districts found in those cigarettes was a great puzzle. They were the worst cigarettes imaginable. Gipsies had a bright lacquered picture of a dark-eyed Gipsy girl with a smoking cigarette between her red lips and a rose in her blue hair. It was worth a mere five, and even that was stretching a point, for the Gipsy girl was shown only from the waist up.

Swallows had a picture of three miserable birds, and they were worth still less than Gipsies—only three.

There were some fools who even smoked Zephyrs, which had no picture at all, but only letters. Nobody ever played for Zephyr tops. And the strangest part of it all was that those cigarettes cost more than any others.

One had to be an absolute idiot to buy such trash. The boys spat in disgust whenever they came across a Zephyr packet.

Petya and Gavrik burned with impatience to grow up and start smoking. They would not make fools of themselves. They would buy only Kerches, a superior brand with a whole picture on the packet: a port town and a harbour with a lot of ships in it.

Even the biggest experts did not know exactly how to price Kerches. There was a difference of opinion on the value of the ships. At any rate, in round numbers

Kerches were quoted on the street exchange at about five hundred.

The boys were unusually lucky.

One might have thought all the smokers near the cemetery had specially set out to make Petya and Gavrik rich, for they smoked Kerches exclusively.

The boys tumbled over each other picking them up. At first they couldn't believe their eyes. It was just like a dream where you found a three-ruble note at every other step.

Soon their pockets were filled to overflowing. They were now so rich that wealth lost its joys. They were surfeited.

Beside a tall narrow factory wall, on whose sooty bricks were painted letters so huge it was impossible to read them at close range, the boys played several rounds of the game, tossing the pictures and waiting to see which side came up.

There was no particular zest to it, however. With so many pictures, neither of them minded losing, and that took all the fun out of playing.

As they strolled on the city changed in appearance and character every minute.

For a time a cemetery and prison atmosphere predominated. That gave way to a warehouse and tavern atmosphere. Then came the factories.

Now the railway dominated the scene. Warehouses, block-signal stations, semaphores.. . . Finally, the road was barred by a striped level-crossing that dropped right before their noses.

A pointsman carrying a green flag came out of his signal box. A whistle blew. A cloud of white steam shot up behind the trees, and past the entranced boys puffed a real engine, a big one, pushing a tender before it.

Oh, what a sight it was! That in itself was worth leaving home without permission.

How busily the connecting rods clicked along, how melodiously the rails sang, and how irresistible was the magnetism of those wheels flashing dizzily past, surrounded by a thick and yet almost transparent covering of steam.

The soul was bewitched, was seized with a mad urge, was drawn into the inhuman, inexorable movement of the machine, while the body resisted the temptation with all its might and drew back, petrified with horror, deserted for an instant by its soul, which had already flung itself under the wheels!

Pale, tiny, the boys stood with shining eyes, their little fists clenched and their feet planted wide apart; they could feel their scalps turning cold.

How terrifying, and at the same time how jolly!

Gavrik, true, was familiar with this emotion, but Petya was experiencing it for the first time. He was so thrilled that at first he paid no attention to the fact that in the driver's place at the oval window was a soldier, in a visorless cap with a red band, and that on the tender stood another soldier, belted with cartridge pouches and holding a rifle. The minute the engine disappeared round the turn the boys ran up the

embankment and pressed their ears against the hot, white-polished rails, which rang out like a brass band.

The joy of pressing his ear against the rail over which a real engine had passed—and no more than an instant before—was that not worth having left home without permission, was that not worth suffering any possible punishment?

"Why was a soldier there instead of the driver?" asked Petya as they continued on their way when they had finished listening to the noise of the rails and had gathered flints from the roadbed.

"Looks like the railwaymen are on strike again," Gavrik replied unwillingly.

"On strike? What's that?"

"A strike's a strike," said Gavrik in a still glummer voice. "They don't go to work. Soldiers run the trains instead."

"Don't soldiers strike too?"

"No. They're not allowed to. If they tried it they'd land in a punishment battalion in no time."

"But otherwise they'd strike?"

"What d'you think?"

"Does your brother Terenti strike?"

"Depends. . . ."

"But why does he do it?"

"Because. Stop pestering me. Look—there's the Odessa Goods Station. And over there is Near Mills."

Petya stretched his neck and looked this way and that, but not a single mill could he see. There were neither windmills nor watermills.

What he did see was: a water tower, the yellow fence of the Odessa Goods Station, red railway carriages, a hospital train with a Red Cross flag painted on it, piles of goods covered with tarpaulin, sentries. . . .

"But where's Near Mills?"

"There it is, just behind the railway shops, you blockhead."

Petya said nothing: he was afraid of being tricked again.

He twisted his head for such a long time that his collar rubbed a sore spot on his neck, but still he did not see any windmills.

Strange!

Gavrik, though, was not the least surprised at their absence. He walked briskly down a narrow path, past a long sooty wall of huge windows with little square panes, many of them broken.

By this time Petya was rather tired. He dragged after Gavrik, shuffling his shoes over the grass, dark from the dust and soot. Every now and then iron shavings, evidently thrown outside through the window, rustled underfoot.

Gavrik got up on his toes and looked into a window.

"Look, Petya, the carriage shops. This is where Terenti works. Did you ever see the place? Come and look."

Petya stood on tiptoe next to Gavrik and looked in through a broken pane.

He saw a vast stretch of dusty air and the tiny clouded squares of the windows opposite. Broad belts hung down; everywhere stood big, uninteresting contraptions with little wheels. The place was strewn with metal shavings. The sunlight coming through the dusty windows lay in pale slanting squares all over the endless floor.

And in all that huge and weird block of space there was not *a* single living soul.

The place was filled, from top to bottom, with such a deathly, supernatural silence that Petya became frightened.

"Nobody there," he said in a barely audible whisper.

Gavrik, infected by Petya's mood, replied by moving his lips almost soundlessly, "Probably on strike again."

"Hey there, get away from those windows!" a rough voice suddenly shouted from somewhere above.

They turned round with a start. Beside them stood a sentry with a rolled greatcoat over his shoulder and a rifle in his hand. He was so close that Petya clearly smelt the dreadful odours of army cabbage soup and boot polish.

The soldier's cartridge pouches of bright-yellow leather — heavy, creaking, and probably full of real bullets— were ominously close, and in general he was so tremendous that his two rows of brass buttons ran upwards to a dizzying height, right to the sky.

"I'm done for!" thought Petya in horror. He felt that at any moment he might do that shamefully unpleasant

thing very small children usually do when overcome by fright.

"Hook it!" cried Gavrik in a thin voice and darted past the soldier.

Petya dashed headlong after his friend. He thought he heard the soldier's boots stamping after him, and so he ran with every ounce of energy he could muster. But the sound of the boots did not fall behind. His eyes saw nothing but the flashing brown soles of Gavrik's feet in front of him.

His heart thumped loud and fast. The soldier was still close behind. The wind roared in his ears.

Only after he had run not less than a mile did Petya realise that what he heard was not the soldier's boots but his straw hat flapping against his back.

The boys gasped for breath. Hot sweat poured down their temples and dripped from their chins.

But a quick change came over Gavrik and Petya the minute they made certain the soldier was nowhere in sight. With an expression of total indifference they carelessly shoved their hands in their pockets and continued their way at a leisurely pace.

By their entire manner they were telling each other that nothing at all had happened—and even if something *had* happened it was a trifling matter not worth talking about.

For quite a while now they had been walking along a broad unpaved road. Although the fences and houses had lanterns like those in the city, with numbers on them, and there were the signs of shops and

workshops, and even a corner chemist's with coloured pitchers and a golden eagle, it looked more like a village lane than a city street.

"Well, where's that Near Mills of yours?" Petya asked in a sour voice.

"This is it. Can't you see?"

"Where?"

"What do you mean where? Here."

"Here?"

"Of course.

"But where are the mills?"

"You're a funny bloke," said Gavrik patronisingly. "Ever see a fountain at the Fontan? You're talking like a baby. Asking questions without knowing what you're asking!"

Petya was silenced. Gavrik was absolutely right. Maly Fontan, Bolshoi Fontan and Sredny Fontan didn't have any fountains at all. It was just a case of "that's what it's called".

This place was called Mills but actually it had no mills.

The mills, though, were only a trifle. Where were the shadows of changed widows and pale little orphan girls in patched frocks? Where were the ghostly grey sky and the weeping willows? Where was the weird, mournful land from which there was no return?

No use asking Gavrik!

To his utter disillusionment Petya saw neither widows, nor weeping willows, nor a grey sky. The sky,

as a matter of fact, was hot and windy and the same bright colour as the blue the laundress used.

In the yards of the houses stood bright-green mulberry trees and acacias. Belated pumpkin blossoms gleamed in the vegetable patches. Over the curly grass walked geese, turning their silly heads to the right and left like the soldiers on Kulikovo Field.

From a smithy came the clang of hammers and the swish of bellows.

All this, of course, was very interesting in its own lights, but it was difficult to give up the idea of a shadowy world where, in some mysterious manner, "reposed" the relatives of men who had died suddenly.

In the innermost recesses of Petya's mind, the struggle continued for a long time—between the shadowy picture of imaginary mills where people "reposed", and the real, brightly-coloured picture of the railwaymen's settlement known as Near Mills, where Gavrik's brother Terenti lived.

23

UNCLE GAVRIK

"Here we are."

Gavrik pushed open the wicket with his foot, and the two friends walked into a parched-looking front garden bordered with purple irises. A huge dog with straw-coloured eyebrows immediately rushed at them.

"Down, Rudko!" shouted Gavrik. "Didn't recognise me, eh?"

The dog sniffed, recognised the boy, and gave a sad smile: he had got excited for nothing. Then he rolled his shaggy tail up into a loop, stuck out his tongue and ran, panting, to the back of the yard. Behind him dragged his clanging chain, fastened to a wire strung high overhead.

A frightened woman peered from the wooden entrance-way of the clay hut.

When she saw it was the boys, she turned and said, wiping her hands on her print apron, "Everything's all right. It's your brother come to see you."

Behind her appeared a tall man in a striped sailor's jersey, the sleeves of which were cut short just below shoulders as thick as a wrestler's.

But the shy look on his face, pock-marked and covered all over with tiny drops of sweat, did not in the least go with his athletic build. His figure was powerful, sort of frightening, even, but his face was just the opposite— gentle, and almost womanish.

The man tightened his belt and walked up to the boys.

"This is Petya, from Kanatnaya and the corner of Kulikovo Field," said Gavrik, indicating his friend with a casual nod. "A schoolmaster's kid. He's all right."

Terenti gave Petya a passing glance and then fixed his small, twinkling eyes on Gavrik. "Now where are those shoes I bought you at Easter? Why must you walk about like a tramp from Duke's Gardens?"

Gavrik gave a long sad whistle. "Ah, those shoes —"

"You're a tramp, nothing but a little tramp!"

Shaking his head, Terenti went to the back of the house. The boys followed him.

There, to his indescribable delight, Petya saw a whole tinsmith's shop set up on an old kitchen table under a mulberry tree. It even had a hissing blowlamp. A strong, clipped, blue flame burst from its short muzzle, like from a tiny cannon.

Judging by the baby's zinc bath-tub leaning upside down against the tree and by the soldering iron in Terenti's hand, he was busy at a job.

"Repair work?" asked Gavrik, spitting on the ground exactly like a grown-up.

"Uh-huh."

"Nothing doing at the shops?"

Ignoring the question, Terenti put the soldering iron into the flame of the blowlamp and attentively watched it grow hot. "That's all right," he muttered. "Don't you worry on our account. I can always find enough work for us to keep body and soul together."

Gavrik sat down on a stool, crossed his bare legs, which did not reach to the ground, braced his hands on his knee and, rocking slowly back and forth, began to "talk shop" with his big brother.

Wrinkling his peeling nose and pulling together his eyebrows, which were completely bleached from the sun and the salt water, Gavrik conveyed best regards from Grandpa, informed Terenti of the price bullheads

were fetching, and waxed indignant about Madam Storozhenko, who was "such a bitch and has us by the throat all the time and never gives people a chance to breathe", and more in the same vein.

Terenti nodded agreement, in the meantime carefully passing the tip of the hot iron across a strip of solder, which melted like butter.

At first glance there might seem nothing unusual, let alone strange, in the fact that one brother had paid a visit to another and was telling him about his affairs. But considering Gavrik's worried air, and also the distance he had had to come for no other purpose than to talk to his brother, it would not be difficult to guess that Gavrik had an important matter on his mind.

Terenti looked at him questioningly several times, but Gavrik indicated Petya with an unobtrusive wink and calmly talked on.

As to Petya, he was so absorbed in the wonderful spectacle of soldering that he forgot everything in the world. He watched round-eyed as the huge shears cut through the thick zinc like so much paper.

One of the most fascinating occupations of Odessa boys was to gather round a tinsmith in the middle of a courtyard and watch him practise his magic art. But there they watched a stranger, a man who was here one minute and gone the next, something like a sleight-of-hand artist on the stage. Quickly and skilfully he would do his work of soldering a tea-kettle, then roll up his pieces of tin into a tube, strap it over his shoulder, pick

up his brazier and walk out of the yard, calling, "Pots to mend, kettles to mend!"

Here, however, Petya was watching someone he *knew,* his friend's brother, an artist who displayed his skill at home, to a chosen few. At any moment he could ask, "I say there, what's in that little iron box? Is it acid?" without getting a rude answer like "Run along, young 'un, you're in the way". No, this was quite, quite different. From sheer delight Petya stuck out his tongue —which was not at all becoming in such a big boy. It is likely that he never would have left that table under the mulberry tree had he not suddenly noticed a girl with a baby in her arms approaching.

With an effort she held up to Gavrik the plump one-year-old infant, who had two shining white teeth in his little coral mouth.

"Look who's come, goo-goo! Gavrik's come, goo-goo! Now say, 'Hello, Uncle Gavrik.' Goo-goo!"

With an extraordinarily grave expression Gavrik reached inside his shirt and, to Petya's boundless amazement, produced a red lollipop in the shape of a cock.

To carry about such a treasure for three hours without tasting it, and what's more without showing it, was something only a person with incredible willpower could do!

Gavrik held out the sweet to the child. "Here," he said.

"Take it, Zhenechka," urged the girl, raising the child up close to the lollipop. "Take it with your little

hand. See what a present Uncle Gavrik's brought you? Take the cock in your hand. That's right, that's the way. And now say, 'Thank you, dear Uncle.' Well, say it, 'Thank you, dear Uncle.' "

The child gripped the bright red lollipop tight in his grimy chubby little hand and blew big bubbles from his mouth. His light-blue eyes stared blankly at his uncle.

"See? That means he's saying, 'Thank you, Uncle'," said the girl, her eyes fixed enviously on the sweet. "But you mustn't put it in your mouth right off. Play with it first. And then after your porridge you can have the lollipop," she continued sensibly, casting quick curious glances at the handsome young stranger in a straw hat and new shoes with buttons.

"This is Petya, from Kanatnaya and the corner of Kulikovo," said Gavrik. "Why don't you go and play with him, Motya?"

The girl became so excited that she turned pale.

Hugging the child close, she edged away backwards, looking distrustfully at Petya, until she bumped into her father's leg.

Terenti patted the girl on the shoulder and straightened the beruffled white bonnet on her close-cropped head. "Play with the boy, Motya," he said. "Show him the Russo-Japanese pictures I bought you when you were lying sick in bed. Play with him, my pet, and give Zhenechka to Mama." '

Motya rubbed her back against her father's leg and then turned up a face red with embarrassment. Her

eyes were full of tears; her tiny turquoise earrings were trembling.

Earrings such as those, Petya had noticed, were usually worn by milkwomen.

"Don't be afraid, my pet. He won't fight with you."

Motya obediently took the child into the house. She returned holding herself as stiff as a poker, with her cheeks drawn in and her expression frightfully grave.

She stopped about four paces away from Petya, took a deep breath, and, stammering and looking to the side, said in an unnaturally thin voice, "If you like, I'll show you my Russo-Japanese pictures."

"Very well," said Petya in a hoarse, careless voice — the voice demanded by good form when speaking to little girls. At the same time he painstakingly, and rather successfully, spat over his shoulder.

"Come along, then."

Not without a certain amount of coquetry the girl turned her back to Petya and, moving her shoulders much more than was necessary, went, skipping now and then, to the back of the yard. There, behind the cellar, she had her doll household.

Petya swaggered along behind. As he looked at the hollow in Motya's thin neck and the little triangle of hair above it, he grew so excited that his knees wobbled.

One could not, of course, call it passionate love. But that it would develop into a serious love affair was beyond all doubt.

24

LOVE

To tell the truth, Petya had been in love many times in the course of his life. First of all, that little brunette — Verochka, wasn't it?—whom he had met at a Christmas party last year in the home of one of Father's colleagues. He had been in love with her all evening; they had sat next to each other at the table, and then, when the candles were put out, they crawled under the Christmas tree in the dark, and the floor was slippery from the fir needles.

It was love at first sight. When, at half past eight, they made ready to take her home, he was overwhelmed with despair. So much so that at the sight of her braids and ribbons vanishing under her hood and fur coat he began to whimper and misbehave.

Then and there he vowed to love her to the grave. In parting he bestowed upon her the cardboard mandolin given him from the Christmas tree, and four nuts: three gold and one silver.

But two days passed, and nothing remained of that love affair except bitter regret of having so foolishly lost the mandolin.

Then, of course, in the country he had fallen in love with Zoya, the girl who wore the pink stockings of a fairy; he even kissed her, by the waterbutt under the apricot tree. But falling in love with Zoya turned out to be a mistake, for the very next day she cheated so

brazenly at croquet that he was forced to rap her over the shins with his mallet. After that, naturally, a love affair was out of the question.

Then there had been his fleeting passion for the lovely girl on the steamer, the one who was travelling first class and had argued all the way with her father, Lord Glenarvan.

But all that did not count. Who, after all, has not experienced such heedless attachments?

Motya was another matter entirely. Besides being a girl, besides having turquoise earrings, besides turning so frightfully pale and red and moving her thin little shoulder-blades so adorably—besides all that, she was the sister of a pal. Actually, of course, not a sister but a niece. But considering Gavrik's age, she was the same as a sister. His friend's sister! Can anything make a girl more attractive and lovable than the fact that she is a *friend's sister?* Does not this in itself contain the seed of inevitable love?

Petya was smitten. By the time they reached the cellar, he was over head and ears in love.

However, to prevent Motya from guessing it he assumed a nasty, high-handed, indifferent manner.

No sooner had Motya politely displayed her dolls, neatly tucked in their little beds, and the little stove with real pots and pans, only little ones, which her father had made from scraps of zinc, than Petya—though, to tell the truth, he found them awfully nice—spat contemptuously through his teeth and, with an insulting snicker, asked, "I say, Motya, why is your hair cut so short?"

"I had typhus," Motya replied in a thin, hurt voice, and she gave such a deep sigh that a tiny *peep*, like a bird's, sounded in her throat. "Do you want to see my pictures?"

Petya condescended.

They sat down on the ground side by side and began to look at the patriotic coloured lithographs, most of them depicting naval battles.

A sticky, dark-blue sky was criss-crossed with thin searchlight rays. Broken masts topped by Japanese flags were crashing down. Out of the sharp-edged waves rose the white jets of explosions. Shells burst in the air like stars.

A Japanese cruiser was sinking; its sharp nose was tilted, and it was enveloped in yellow-red flames. Little yellow-faced men were tumbling into the sea.

"Jappies!" breathed the enchanted girl as she crawled round the picture on her knees.

"Not Jappies but Japs," Petya corrected her sternly. *He* knew what was what in politics.

In another picture a dashing Cossack with red stripes down the sides of his breeches and a high black

fur cap worn at an angle had just sliced off the nose of a Japanese who had stuck his head up from behind a hill.

A thick stream of blood gushed in an arc from the face of the Japanese soldier. His stubby orange-coloured nose with its two black nostrils lay all by itself on the hill, and this sent the children into peals of laughter.

"Don't poke your nose where it doesn't belong!" cried Petya, laughing and beating his hands against the warm dry earth spotted with white hen droppings.

"Don't poke your nose!" chanted Motya, looking over her shoulder at the handsome boy and wrinkling her thin sharp nose, which was as motley as Gavrik's.

The third picture showed the same Cossack and the same hill, on the other side of which the puttees of a fleeing Japanese could now be seen. At the bottom was this inscription:

There was a Jap general Nogi, Ha-ha!
And Ivan, he just knocked him groggy, la-la!

"Don't poke your nose, don't poke your nose!" Motya sang in glee, nestling trustfully against Petya. "Isn't that right? *He* shouldn't go poking his nose in either, should he?"

Petya, frowning, turned a deep red and did not reply. He was trying hard to keep his eyes from the girl's thin little bare arm with its two shiny vaccination

marks, which were the same delicate flesh colour as paper stickers.

But it was too late. He was already hopelessly in love.

And when it turned out that besides pictures of the Russo-Japanese War Motya had first-class flints, nuts with which to play "king and prince", sweets wrappers, and even cigarette pictures, Petya's love reached its apogee.

Ah, what a day of rare and wonderful happiness that was! Never in his life would Petya forget it.

He became curious as to how the earrings held on, and the girl showed him the holes, which had been pierced only a short time before. He even ventured to touch the lobe of her ear; it was soft, and still slightly swollen, like a piece of tangerine.

After that they played pictures. Petya cleaned her out, but she looked so downcast that he took pity on her and not only returned all the pasteboards he had won but made her a present of all his. Let her know how generous he was!

Then they gathered dry weeds and kindling and lighted the doll's stove. There was a great deal of smoke but no fire. They gave this up and began to play hide-and-seek.

In hiding from each other they crawled into such distant and out-of-the-way spots that it was a bit scarey to remain there alone.

Yet what burning joy it was to listen to the approach of cautious footsteps as you sat in the hiding

place, mouth and nose covered with both hands to keep from giggling!

How furiously your heart pounded, how wildly your ears rang!

All at once half of a face pale with excitement, its lips tightly pressed together, slowly appears from behind a corner. The peeling nose, the round eye, the pointed chin, the little white bonnet with the ruffles.

Their eyes suddenly meet. Both are so startled that they feel they are about to faint. And then the wild, blood-curdling cry of triumph and victory:

"Petya, seen you!"

And both dash off for all they are worth to reach the rapping stick first.

"Seen you!"

"Seen you!"

Once the girl hid so far away that the boy spent all of half an hour looking for her, until finally he thought of climbing over the back fence and trying the pasture.

There, in a pit overgrown with weeds, sat Motya, her thin chin resting on her scratched knees, and her eyes fixed on the sky, across which a late-afternoon cloud was floating.

Around her crickets were chirping and cows were grazing. It was all very frightening, and she was scared to death.

Petya looked down into the pit. For a long time they gazed into each other's eyes, experiencing a strange, burning embarrassment which was not at all like any of the feelings connected with the game.

"Seen you, Motya!" the boy wanted to shout, but he could not get out a single sound. No, decidedly, this was no longer part of the game but something altogether different.

Motya climbed carefully out of the pit and they strolled back to the yard. They were embarrassed; they nudged each other with their shoulders, yet at the same time they discreetly refrained from holding hands.

Over the immortelles of the pasture glided the cool shadow of the cloud.

The minute they climbed the fence, however, Petya came to his senses.

"Seen you!" the sly boy cried wildly, and he raced for the stick so as to rap the napping girl with it.

In a word, it was all so unusual and so engrossing that Petya at first paid no attention to Gavrik when he came up to them at the height of the game.

"Say, Petya, what was that sailor's name?" Gavrik asked with a preoccupied frown.

"Which sailor?"

"The one who jumped off the *Turgenev."*

"I don't know."

"But don't you remember you told me how that skunk with the moustaches, the detective, called him by his name?"

"Why, yes, that's right! Zhukov. Rodion Zhukov. And now don't bother us, we're playing."

Gavrik left, wearing the same preoccupied frown. As to Petya, he was so completely absorbed in his new

love affair that this conversation immediately flew out of his mind.

Soon after, Motya's mother called them to supper.

"Motya, invite your gentleman friend to come in and have some gruel with us," she said. "He must be hungry."

Motya blushed furiously, then turned pale and drew herself as erect as a stick, the way she had before. "Would you like to have some gruel with us?" she said in a choky voice.

Only then did Petya realise that he was hungry. Why, he hadn't had any dinner that day!

Never in all his life had he eaten such thick, delicious gruel with hardish, smoke-flavoured potatoes and little cubes of pork.

After that marvellous supper in the open air, under the mulberry tree, the boys set out for home.

Terenti accompanied them back to town. He ran into the house for a moment and came out wearing a short jacket and a lustrine cap with a button on the top of it. He carried a thin iron rod from an umbrella, the kind Odessa artisans usually took with them when they went out walking on a holiday.

"Don't go, Terenti dear, it's late," his wife pleaded as she saw him off to the gate.

The anxiety in her eyes made Petya feel somehow uneasy.

"Stay at home instead. You can never tell what—"

"I have things to do."

"You know best," she said submissively.

"Everything'll be all right," Terenti said with a gay wink.

"Don't go past the goods station."

"Never fear."

"Good luck, then."

"Same to you."

Terenti and the boys set out for town.

But the route they took was altogether different from the one by which the boys had come. Terenti led them through vacant lots, backyard vegetable patches and side streets. This route turned out to be much shorter, and they met fewer people on the way.

Quite unexpectedly they came out on familiar Sennaya Square. Here Terenti said to Gavrik, "I'll drop in later this evening," and with a nod of his head he disappeared in the crowd.

The sun had already set. In some of the shops the lamps were being lit.

"What *will* they say at home!" Petya thought in horror.

His happiness was over. Now he would have to pay for it. He tried to keep his thoughts from dwelling on this, but he found it impossible.

Lord, what his new shoes looked like! And his stockings! Where had those big round holes in the knees come from? They hadn't been there in the morning. His hands were a sight—as filthy as a cobbler's. And the spots of tar on his cheeks. Good God!

No doubt about it; there'd be a terrific row when he got home!

If they'd only give him a whipping it wouldn't be so bad. But the whole trouble was they would never do that. They would groan and moan and wring his heart with reproaches—and the worst of it was that the reproaches would all be just.

Father might even grab him by the shoulders and shake him as hard as he could, shouting, "Where have you been, you good-for-nothing! Do you want to drive me to my grave?" And that, as everybody knew, was ten times worse than the worst possible whipping.

These and similar bitter thoughts put the boy into a thoroughly depressed mood, aggravated by infinite regret at the burst of passion which had moved him so foolishly to give away those pictures to the first girl he met.

25

"I WAS STOLEN"

No power on earth, it seemed, could save Petya from an unprecedented row. It was not for nothing, however, that the hair on Petya's crown grew in two whorls instead of one, as it does on most boys, and this, as anyone will tell you, is the surest sign of luck. Providence sent Petya an unexpected deliverance.

He could have expected anything under the sun, but never this.

Not far from Sennaya Square, in Staro-Portofrankovskaya Street, he saw Pavlik running along the pavement. He was all by himself.

He stumbled as he ran, and tears streamed down his grimy cheeks as though they were being squeezed out of a rag. His pink little tongue quivered ruefully in the open square of his mouth. From his nose hung two pearly drops.

He was emitting a steady wail, but since he was running at the same time what he produced was not a smooth "Ahhhh" but a jerky and hiccupy "Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!"

"Pavlik?!!"

At sight of his brother, Pavlik ran up to him as fast as he could and clutched his sailor blouse with both hands.

"Petya! Petya!" he cried, trembling and panting. "Oh, Petya dear!"

"What are you doing here, you bad boy?" Petya asked sternly.

Instead of replying, Pavlik began to hiccup. He could not utter a word.

"Answer me: what are you doing here? Well? Where have you been, you good-for-nothing? I see you want to drive me to my grave, eh? Say something or else I'll have to slap some sense into you."

Petya seized Pavlik by the shoulders and shook him until he cried out through his hiccups, "I—hie!—I was — st-stolen!"

Then again he gave way to tears.

What had happened?

Petya was not the only one, it appeared, who had got the happy idea of taking a stroll on his own the day after returning to town. Pavlik had dreamt of the same thing a long time.

He had not intended, of course, to wander off as far as Petya did. His plans included a visit to the rubbish-heap, and, at the outside, a walk round the corner to watch how the soldiers at the entrance to Army Staff building presented arms.

Unfortunately, who should come into the yard just then but Vanka-Rutyutyu, or Punch.

Together with the other children, Pavlik watched the show from beginning to end. But he found it too short. A rumour spread, though, that in the next yard a longer performance would be given.

The children followed Vanka-Rutyutyu into the next yard, but there the show was still shorter. It came to an end at the part where Vanka-Rutyutyu—a long-nosed puppet with the stiff neck of a paralytic, wearing a cap that looked like a pod of red pepper—killed the policeman with a blow of his stick. But absolutely everybody knew that after that there must come a horrible monster— something halfway between a furry yellow duck and a crocodile—and this monster would

seize Vanka-Rutyutyu's head in its jaws and drag him off to the nether regions.

This part, however, was not shown. Perhaps it was because not enough coppers had been thrown from the windows. In the next yard, though, business was certain to be better.

Their eyes fixed on the wicker basket where the puppets lay mysteriously hidden, the bewitched children moved from one courtyard to the next in the wake of the loudly-dressed woman with a street organ slung over her shoulder and the hatless man carrying a screen under his arm.

Pavlik, devoured by curiosity, trudged along beside the other children on his sturdy little legs, his tongue sticking out and his light chocolate-coloured eyes, with their large black pupils, open wide. He forgot everything —Daddy and Auntie Tatyana, and even Kudlatka whom he had not had time to put in the stable or give a good portion of oats and hay.

The boy lost all sense of time. When he came out of his trance he discovered with a start that night was falling and that he was following the street organ along totally unfamiliar streets. All the other children had long since disappeared. He was quite alone.

The loudly-dressed woman and the man with the screen walked along quickly, evidently in a hurry to get home. Pavlik could scarcely keep up with them. The streets became more and more strange and suspicious. It seemed to Pavlik that the man and woman were whispering something in a sinister manner.

They turned a corner and then suddenly wheeled round, and Pavlik noticed in alarm that there was a cigarette in the woman's mouth. Terror swept over him. He began to tremble as he suddenly remembered. Absolutely everybody knew that organ-grinders enticed little children away from home, broke their arms and legs, and then sold them to the circus as acrobats.

How, oh how could he have forgotten that! It was as well known as the fact that sweets manufactured by "Krakhmalnikov Bros." could poison you, or that the ice-cream sold in the streets was made of milk in which sick people had bathed.

Here there could be no doubt. Only Gipsy women and other women who stole children smoked. In another minute they would seize him, stuff a rag into his mouth, and carry him off to Romanovka, where they would twist his arms and legs out of their sockets and turn him into an acrobat.

With a loud wail Pavlik turned and fled. He ran as fast as he could, until suddenly he bumped into Petya.

After giving his little brother a good spanking Petya triumphantly dragged him home by the arm. At home, panic reigned. Dunya was running frantically through the neighbouring courtyards, her cheap taffeta skirts swishing. Auntie Tatyana was rubbing her temples with a migraine stick. Father was getting into his summer coat to go down to the police station to report his children missing.

Upon seeing Pavlik safe and sound, Auntie rushed up to him, undecided whether to laugh or to cry.

She did both at the same time. Then she spanked the little vagrant soundly. Then she planted kisses all over his smudgy little face. Then she spanked him again.

Only after that did she turn a threatening face to Petya.

"And what about *you*, my friend?"

"Where were you gadding about, you bandit?" Father shouted, seizing the boy by the shoulder.

"I was looking for Pavlik," Petya replied modestly. "I ran all over the city before I found him. You ought to thank me. If not for me he would have been stolen long ago."

Then and there he launched into a magnificent tale of how he had chased the organ-grinder, how the organ-grinder had tried to escape him down back alleys, and how he had finally seized the organ-grinder by the collar and shouted for the police. Then the organ-grinder became frightened, let go of Pavlik, and ran away.

"Otherwise I'd have had him put in jail, by the true and holy Cross!"

Although Petya's story, contrary to his expectations, aroused not the slightest admiration, and Father even wrinkled his nose in disgust and said, "Aren't you ashamed to talk such nonsense?" there was nothing anyone could do about it, for it was Petya, and Petya

alone, who had found the missing Pavlik. Thanks to that Petya got off scot-free.

That's what came of being a lucky boy with two whorls on his crown!

Meanwhile Gavrik had returned to the hut to find Grandpa and the sailor greatly excited. A little while before, some officials had come to the hut, supposedly from the city council, to check up on Grandpa's fishing permit. The papers had been in order.

"Who's that on the bed?" the gentleman with the brief case had suddenly asked, noticing the sailor.

Grandpa did not know what to say.

"Is he ill? If so, then why don't you take him to the hospital?"

"No," said Grandpa, putting on an air of cheerful indifference. "He's not ill; he's drunk."

"Drunk, is he? Your son?"

"No."

"A stranger?"

"I tell you he's a drunk, Your Honour."

"Yes, I understand. But where did he come from?"

"Where?" Grandpa repeated, pretending he was a half-witted old man. "He's a drunk, I tell you. You know, a drunk. He was lying in the weeds, that's all."

The gentleman looked closely at the sailor.

"Was he lying in the weeds like that, in nothing but his underdrawers?"

"That's how I found him."

"Hey, you! Let me smell your breath!" the gentleman shouted, putting his face down close to the sailor's.

Zhukov made believe he did not hear. He turned his face to the wall and covered his head with a pillow.

"Strange! A drunk who doesn't smell of alcohol," the gentleman remarked. Then he added, regarding Grandpa severely, "You'd better look out, there!"

With that the officials departed.

Gavrik did not like the looks of this at all.

Passing by the restaurant he had seen the district police inspector, the nasty one whom the local fishermen called "our boat snooper", seated at a table.

The inspector had been drinking beer, and his heavy mug stood on a thick round piece of cardboard with the inscription "Sanzenbacher's Beer". He had seemed less interested in the beer, however, than in the time shown by his silver watch.

The sailor felt much better. Evidently the crisis had passed. He was no longer feverish.

He sat on the edge of the bed, rubbing his stubbly cheeks.

"I'll have to get out of here at once," he said.

"Where'll you go without trousers?" Grandpa asked sadly. "Stay here until dark. No other way out. Hungry, Gavrik?"

"I had supper at Terenti's."

Grandpa raised his eyebrows. Think of it! His grandson had already been at Terenti's. Quick work!

"How are things there?"

"He's planning to drop in today."

The old man chewed his lips and raised his eyebrows still higher, marvelling at how quick-witted his grandson was. Why, he grasped things better than many a grown man. And on top of everything, he was shrewd. Oh, how shrewd he was!

Although only nine and a half, Gavrik really did have a better understanding of some things than many adults. This was not surprising, for from his earliest years he had lived among fishermen, and the fishermen of Odessa did not differ essentially from the sailors, stokers, shipyard workers and dockers, that is to say, from the poorest and most freedom-loving section of the city's population.

They all had more than their share of life's trials and tribulations, the children no less than the adults—and perhaps even more.

This was the year 1905, the year of the first Russian revolution.

The poor, the disinherited, the oppressed were rising to fight tsarism. And not the last among them were the fishermen.

It was a fierce struggle that had started, a struggle to the death. And a struggle that taught them to be shrewd, cautious, vigilant, daring.

All these qualities had gradually, imperceptibly, grown and developed in our little fisherman.

Gavrik's brother Terenti had also been a fisherman. After his marriage, however, he had gone to work in the railway shops. From many signs Gavrik could not

help guessing that his elder brother had something to do with what in those times was vaguely and significantly called "the Movement".

When he visited Terenti at Near Mills, Gavrik often heard him use words like "committee", "faction", "password". Although he did not know what they meant, he sensed that they were connected with words like "strike", "police agent" and "leaflet", words everyone understood.

Gavrik knew especially well what leaflets were, those sheets of rough paper with small grey letters printed on them. Once Terenti had asked him to distribute some along the shore, and he had put them, at night, in the fishing boats, trying to do it so that no one saw him.

Terenti had said, "If anyone sees you, throw them into the water and run. If they catch you, say you found them in the bushes."

But everything had gone off all right.

And so, that was why Gavrik had decided to go straight to his brother about the sailor. He knew that Terenti would arrange everything. He also understood, however, that his brother would have to consult someone else, and to go somewhere, perhaps even to that "Committee".

That meant they must wait. But waiting was becoming dangerous.

Several times the sailor opened the door a crack and cautiously peeped out. It was fairly dark by now, but not dark enough to risk going out the way he was

without attracting attention, especially since there were still many people on the beach and they could hear singing from rowing-boats on the water.

The sailor returned to the bed. "The rats! The damned bloodhounds!" he said in a loud voice, no longer wary of the old man and Gavrik. "Just let me get my hands on them! I'll—I don't know what I'd do to them! I'd risk my head but I'd pay them back—" And he quietly struck the bed with his massive fist.

26

THE PURSUIT

Night had already fallen when the door of the hut was suddenly pushed open, and for an instant the body of a big man shut out the stars. The sailor sprang to his feet.

"That's all right," Gavrik said. "It's our Terenti."

The sailor sat down again, peering into the darkness at the newcomer.

"Evening," came Terenti's voice. "It's so dark I can't see a soul. Why don't you light the lamp? What's up, out of paraffin?"

"There's a few drops left." Grandpa rose with a grunt and lighted the lamp.

"Hello, Grandpa, how are things going with you? I was in town today and I thought, what about looking

my own folk up? Why, I see you've got a visitor as it is. Hello, there."

Terenti gave the stranger a quick, close glance in the flickering light of the wick lamp.

"He's the one we fished out of the sea," Grandpa explained wryly, with a good-natured grin.

"So I hear."

The sailor said nothing. He eyed Terenti with glum suspicion.

"Rodion Zhukov, I take it?" Terenti said, a gay note in his voice.

The sailor gave a start but instantly controlled himself. He braced himself more firmly against the bed with his fists and narrowed his eyes.

"What about it?" he said with a defiant smile. "Why do I have to tell *you?* I answer only to the Committee."

The grin faded from Terenti's pock-marked face. Never had Gavrik seen his brother so grave.

"You may take me for the Committee," Terenti replied after a moment's reflection. He sat down on the bed beside the sailor.

"Prove it," the sailor said stiffly, edging away.

"First prove who *you* are."

The sailor indicated his underdrawers with an angry glance. "Can't you see for yourself?"

"That's not enough."

Terenti walked over to the door, opened it a crack and said in a low voice, "Will you come in for a minute, Ilya Borisovich?"

There was a rustling in the bushes, and then a short frail young man wearing pince-nez on a black ribbon looped behind one ear entered the hut. A black sateen Russian blouse belted with a leather strap showed beneath his old, unbuttoned jacket. Atop his shock of hair perched a flat engineering student's cap.

The sailor felt that he had seen this "student" somewhere before.

The young fellow turned sidewise, adjusted his pince-nez and squinted at the sailor with one eye.

"Well?" Terenti asked.

"I saw this comrade on the morning of June the 15th at the Platonov jetty guarding the body of the sailor Vakulinchuk who was brutally murdered by officers," the young fellow said quickly, without stopping for breath. "You were there, Comrade, weren't you?"

"Right you are."

"There. I knew I wasn't mistaken."

Without saying a word Terenti produced a bundle from under his jacket and laid it on the sailor's knees.

"Trousers, a belt and a jacket, couldn't get boots, sorry, so you'll have to go without until you can buy some, and now get dressed and don't lose any time about it, we'll turn our backs," the young fellow said all in one breath, adding, "I've an idea this place is being watched."

Terenti gave a wink. "Get going, Gavrik."

Gavrik understood at once and quietly slipped out of the hut into the darkness. He stopped and listened.

He thought he heard a rustle among the dry potato bushes in the vegetable patch.

He crouched and tiptoed forward. Suddenly, when his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he clearly saw two motionless figures in the middle of the patch.

The boy caught his breath. His ears began to ring so loudly that he no longer heard the sea. Biting his lips savagely, he made his way without a single sound to the rear of the hut to see if there was anyone on the path.

On the path stood two other men, one of them in a white jacket.

Gavrik crawled towards the hill and there he saw several men. He could tell at once they were policemen by their white jackets. The hut was surrounded.

He was just about to run back when a big, hot hand firmly seized him from behind by the scruff of the neck. He broke away, but the next instant he was tripped up and sent sprawling into the bushes.

A pair of strong hands gripped him. He twisted round, and, to his horror, found himself face to face with Moustaches; he was staring into an open foul-breathed mouth and at a chin as rough as a pine board.

"Plee-eease," Gavrik whined in a thin little voice.

"Shut up, you dog!" hissed Moustaches.

"Let me go, plee-eease, let me go!"

"I'll teach you to shout, you little rat," Moustaches muttered through his teeth, seizing Gavrik's ear in fingers of steel.

Gavrik shrank back and, turning his face to the hut, screamed in a wild voice, "Hook it!"

"Shut up or I'll kill you!"

Moustaches yanked Gavrik's ear so savagely that it cracked. Gavrik felt as though his head had split. It was stabbed by horrible, unimaginable pain. At the same time he was swept by a wave of hatred and anger that turned everything black before his eyes.

"Hook it!" he shouted again at the top of his voice, writhing with pain.

Moustaches threw himself on Gavrik. Continuing to twist his ear savagely, he used his other hand to stop the boy's mouth. But Gavrik rolled on the ground, biting the sweaty, hateful, hairy hand. Weeping, he shouted frenziedly, "Hoo-ook it!"

Moustaches violently flung Gavrik aside and raced towards the hut. A long police whistle sounded.

Gavrik got to his feet and saw at once that his shouts had been heard, for three figures—two tall and one short —dashed out of the hut and across the vegetable patch, stumbling as they ran.

Two white jackets barred their way. The fugitives wheeled about, only to find that they were surrounded.

"Halt!" an unfamiliar voice cried out of the darkness.

"Shoot, Ilya!" Gavrik heard Terenti yell in desperation.

The next instant there were three flashes and three revolver shots one after the other, sounding like the

cracking of a whip. The shouts and grunts told Gavrik that a scrimmage was going on in the darkness.

Would they be caught? So overcome with horror that he did not know what he was doing, Gavrik dashed forward, as if he could help them in some way.

He had not run more than ten paces when he saw the same three figures—two tall and one short—tear themselves away from the tussle, run towards the bluff and disappear in the darkness. "Stop them! Stop them!"

There was a flash of red light, followed by the loud report of a policeman's Smith & Wesson. Police whistles shrilled at the top of the bluff. It looked as if a cordon had been posted all along the shore.

Gavrik listened with a sinking heart to the hue and cry of the pursuit. It was beyond him why Terenti had chosen to run in that direction. Only a madman would have climbed the bluff. Straight into a trap, where they would all be caught. It would have been better to try to escape along the beach.

He ran on a bit farther. He thought he could make out three figures crawling up the sheer wall of the bluff. They were done for!

"Oh, Terenti, why did you go that way!" the boy whispered in despair. He bit his hand to keep from crying, but scalding tears tickled his nose and stung his throat. Then all of a sudden Gavrik understood why they had chosen the bluff. He'd quite forgotten. And yet it was so simple! The point was that—

At this very moment Moustaches flung himself at Gavrik, caught him under the arms and dragged him

backwards, tearing the boy's shirt. He pushed him into the hut, near which two policemen were now standing. Gavrik struck his cheek painfully against the door and fell on top of Grandpa, who was sitting on the floor in the corner, his legs crossed under him.

"If they get away, I'll have your heads!" Moustaches yelled at the policemen, and ran out.

Gavrik sat down beside Grandpa, crossing his legs under him in the same way. They sat in silence, listening to the whistles and cries gradually dying away in the distance.

At last all was silence.

Only then did Gavrik become aware of his ear. He had forgotten all about it, but it ached terribly. It felt as if it were on fire. Even touching it was painful.

"That devil! Almost tore my ear right off!" he muttered, trying his hardest to hold back the tears and to appear indifferent.

Grandpa glanced at him without turning his head. The old man's eyes were motionless and horrifyingly blank. He softly chewed his lips. For a long time he was silent. At last he shook his head and said reproachfully, "Who ever saw the likes of it? Tearing off a child's ear! Is that the way to act?"

He drew a heavy sigh and took to chewing his lips again. All at once he bent anxiously over Gavrik, looked fearfully at the door to see whether anyone was listening, and whispered, "Did you hear anything? Did they get away?"

"They went up the bluff," Gavrik said rapidly in an undertone. "Terenti took them to the catacombs. If they're not shot down on the path they're sure to get away."

Grandpa turned his face to the icon of the miracle worker, closed his eyes, and slowly crossed himself with a sweeping gesture, pressing his folded fingers hard against his forehead, his stomach and both shoulders.

A tear, so tiny that it was almost invisible, crept down his cheek and disappeared in a wrinkle.

27

GRANDPA

Many cities of the world have catacombs—Rome, Naples, Constantinople, Alexandria, Paris, Odessa.

Some fifty years earlier, Odessa's catacombs had been limestone quarries. To this day they run in a labyrinth beneath the entire city, with several exits beyond its limits. Everyone in Odessa knew, of course, that the catacombs were there, but few had ever gone down into them, and fewer still had any idea of their layout. The catacombs were, in a way, Odessa's mystery, its legend.

Terenti, however, had once been a fisherman. He knew the Odessa shoreline perfectly, and had made an exact study of all the catacomb exits there.

One of these exits was located a hundred paces behind the hut, halfway up the bluff. It was a narrow opening concealed by growths of sweet-brier and spindle tree. A brook trickled out of the opening and ran down the bluff, causing the creepers and weeds to tremble.

After repulsing the first attack of the policemen and the detectives, Terenti led his comrades straight to the opening in the bluff.

Their pursuers knew nothing of its existence. They thought the fugitives were trying to make their way to town through the villa district. This played into their hands, for they had the district surrounded and the fugitives would be trapped for certain.

And so, after the first shots the policemen were ordered to hold their fire.

When he had waited below for about a quarter of an hour, the chief of the Alexandrovsky police station, who was directing the raid personally, sent the district police inspector to find out if the criminals had been caught.

The inspector took the easy but roundabout path to the top of the bluff, and another quarter of an hour passed before he returned to report that the fugitives had not been seen up there. It thus turned out that they were neither at the top nor at the bottom. Then where were they? It was utterly impossible to think they were

sitting in the bushes somewhere halfway up the bluff, waiting to be caught.

Nevertheless, the chief ordered his men to climb up and search every bush. Then, no longer trusting "those fools", he himself followed them, letting out strings of oaths as his patent-leather boots slipped on the grass and clay.

They combed the bluff from bottom to top but nothing did they find. It seemed a miracle. The fugitives couldn't have been swallowed up by the earth!

"Your Honour!" a frightened voice suddenly cried from above. "Could you please come here?"

"What's the matter?"

"It's the catacombs, Your Honour."

The chief of police reached up and caught hold of the thorny bushes with his white-gloved hands. An instant later he was seized by strong hands and pulled up to a small ledge.

Moustaches struck one match after another, and by their light they could make out a long black crevice overgrown with bushes.

The chief saw at once that he had lost. What a catch had escaped him! He shook with rage; he stamped his elegant boots; his white-gloved fists struck out right and left, hitting random noses, cheekbones and moustaches.

"What are you standing there for, you idiots!" he blustered in a voice hoarse from shouting. "Forward, march! Search all the catacombs! Catch those scoundrels or else I'll tear your heads off! I'll smash your damned mugs to a pulp! Forward, march!"

But he knew that it was hopeless. To search all the catacombs would take a fortnight at least. And it was useless even to start, for they had already lost more than half an hour and the fugitives had undoubtedly reached the other side of town long since.

Several policemen unwillingly crawled through the opening. Lighting matches continually, they hovered not far from the entrance, examining the damp

limestone walls of the underground passage that disappeared into sepulchral darkness.

The chief spat on the ground in disgust and ran down the side of the bluff, his spurs jingling. He was choking with fury. He tore so violently at the over-starched collar of his white pique uniform jacket that the hooks flew off.

He strode through the crackling bushes to the hut, and savagely wrenched open the door. The policemen sprang to attention in fright. The chief stepped into the little room and halted, his feet wide apart and his twitching fingers behind his back. He was followed through the door by Moustaches.

"Your Honour," Moustaches whispered mysteriously, his round eyes indicating Grandpa, "he's the owner of this undercover place and that's his brat."

Without glancing at Moustaches the chief stretched out his arm, put the flat of his white hand against the man's sweaty face, and pushed it away in furious disgust.

"No one's asking you, you fool! I know that myself!"

Gavrik was horror-stricken. He felt something dreadful was about to happen. Small, pale, his ear red and swollen, he stared unblinkingly at the erect, broad-shouldered officer in the blue breeches and black patent-leather shoulder belt.

After standing like that fully a minute, a minute that seemed an hour to the boy, the chief sat down on the edge of the bed. Without taking his eyes off Grandpa

he stretched out a patent-leather boot, drew a silver cigarette case and an orange-coloured matchbox from his tight breeches' pocket, and lit a yellow cigarette.

"He smokes Asmolovs," Gavrik thought.

The chief blew the smoke through his nostrils, drawling out a "Ss-o-o-oo!" together with the smoke. Then he suddenly shouted at the top of his lungs, in a voice so loud that Gavrik's ears rang. "Stand up in the presence of an officer, you scoundrel!"

Grandpa nervously sprang to attention. Standing on his bent, bare black legs and adjusting the shirt over his frail chest, he stared at the chief with dull, expressionless eyes.

Gavrik could see Grandpa's taut neck trembling; the dry skin, on which there was an old scar, stretched like two reins.

"So you're hiding outlaws, eh?" the chief said in an icy voice.

"No, sir," Grandpa whispered.

"Speak up, now. Who was just here?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know, eh?" The chief slowly rose to his feet, compressing his lips. With a clipped, precise swing he gave the old man a blow in the ear that flung him against the wall.

"Speak up! Who were they?"

"I don't know, sir," the old man repeated firmly, his jaw muscles twitching.

Again the fist in the white glove flashed through the air. Two trickles of blood began to flow from

Grandpa's nostrils. He closed his eyes, hunched his shoulders, and caught his breath with a sob.

"What's this beating for, Your Honour?"

Grandpa's voice was low but stern. He wiped his nose and showed the chief his blood-stained hand.

"None of your lip!" cried the chief, turning pale.

The large velvety birth mark stood out black on his plaster-white face. He glanced disgustedly at his spoilt glove.

"Speak up! Who were they?"

"I don't know."

Grandpa had time to cover his face with his hands and turn to the wall. The blow struck him on the head. His trousers bagged out at the knees. Slowly he sank to the floor.

"Don't hit him! He's an old man!" cried Gavrik with tears of despair, flinging himself at the chief.

But the chief was already striding out of the hut. "Take this scoundrel into custody!" he shouted.

The policemen seized the old man and twisted his arms behind his back. They dragged him out of the hut as though he were a bundle of straw. Gavrik dropped to the floor and, gnawing at his fists, burst into sobs of rage.

For some time he sat motionless, listening with one ear to the noises and stirrings of the night. His other ear was deaf.

Every now and then he deliberately put his finger in his good ear, and a profound silence enveloped him. It

was a terrifying silence, in which some nameless danger seemed to lurk.

He would then uncover his ear, as if hurrying to release the imprisoned sounds. One ear, however, could not take in all the different sounds at the same time.

First he would hear the deep infrequent sighs of the sea, and nothing else. Then the tinkling music of the crickets would break in, shutting out the sound of the sea. A warm breeze, passing over the weeds, would fill the night with rustling, and leave no place either for the crickets or the sea. Then there would be only the sputtering of the lamp, in which the paraffin had burnt out.

All at once a realisation of his loneliness swept over the boy. He sprang to his feet, blew out the lamp, and dashed off to look for Grandpa.

A luxuriant August night enveloped the world. The twinkling black sky showered its stars upon the running boy. The chirp of the crickets streamed as high as the Milky Way itself.

But what did all that indifferent beauty matter to the tortured, outraged child since it had no power to make him happy!

Gavrik ran as fast as he could.

By the time he caught up with Grandpa and the two policemen they were already in Staro-Portofrankovskaya Street, just outside the police station. They were riding in a droshky, one of the policemen sitting and the other standing. Grandpa had

fallen off the seat. He lay on the floor at the policeman's feet, his head bobbing helplessly against the step. The light from the gas lamps flickered across his face, streaked with dust and blood.

Gavrik made a dash forward but the droshky came to a stop in front of the police station. The policemen dragged the stumbling old man through the gate.

"Grandpa!"

One of the policemen rapped Gavrik across the back of the neck with the scabbard of his sword. The gate swung closed. The boy remained alone.

28

STUBBORN AUNTIE TATYANA

Petya's moment of supreme happiness and triumph had come.

By one o'clock in the afternoon he had already made the round of all his acquaintances in the 'house to show his new Gymnasium cap and give an excited account of the exam he had just passed.

To be quite truthful, there was almost nothing to tell. There had been no actual examination but merely a simple entrance test lasting fifteen minutes. It began at half past ten, and by five minutes past eleven the bowing, smiling assistant in the shop next door to the Gymnasium was handing the boy his old straw hat wrapped in paper.

From the moment he put it on before the shop mirror and right through until evening, Petya did not remove his new cap.

"What a grand showing I made in that exam!" Petya declared excitedly as he hurried down the street beside Auntie Tatyana.

He kept looking in all the windows to catch glimpses of himself in his new cap.

"Calm yourself, my dear," Auntie Tatyana remarked, her chin quivering with suppressed laughter. "It wasn't an exam but only a test."

"Why, Auntie Tatyana, how can you say that!" Petya cried at the top of his voice. He turned red with anger and stamped his feet, ready to burst into tears. "You weren't there, yet you talk! It was a *real* examination. You were waiting in the reception room, so you have no right to say it wasn't. I tell you it *was* an exam!"

"To be sure. I'm the fool, and you're the clever one. It was only a test."

"It wasn't! It was an exam!"

"You *will* insist that the beard was clipped."

Auntie Tatyana was referring to the old Ukrainian joke about the stubborn fellow who argued with his wife as to whether the volost clerk's beard was clipped or shaven. Despite all evidence to the contrary he kept insisting it was clipped. Finally his infuriated wife picked him up and threw him into the river. He continued to shout "It was clipped!" and as his head went under the water he raised one hand and made clipping motions with his fingers.

But Petya did not take the hint. In a tearful voice he kept repeating, "It was an *exam!* It was an *exam!"*

Auntie Tatyana was a kindhearted woman, and now she began to feel sorry that she was depriving her nephew of the most precious part of his triumph. If the word "exam" meant so much to the boy, then let him have his joy of it. Why irritate him on this happy day?

And so, she made a bargain with her conscience. "On second thought, I probably was mistaken," she said with a subtle smile, "I do believe it really was an exam."

Petya beamed. "And *what* an exam!"

Yet deep down inside Petya was consumed by doubts. It had all been much too quick and easy for an exam.

True, the children had been lined up in twos and led into a classroom. Also, there had been a long table covered with a blue cloth. And behind that table had sat stern examiners in blue uniforms with gold buttons, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, medals, starched shirt-fronts that looked as stiff as egg-shells, and cuffs that crackled. Among them had stood out the silk cassock and womanish curls of a priest.

Petya had felt his stomach sink; his feet had turned clammy; an icy sweat had broken out on his temples. All the symptoms known since time immemorial had been there.

But as to the exam itself— No, Petya now clearly saw that it was only a test, after all.

The minute the boys had seated themselves at the desks one of the examiners buried his nose in a big sheet of paper on the table and said, rolling out each word beautifully and distinctly, "Well, let us begin. These boys will please step forward: Alexandrov, Boris; Alexandrov, Nikolai; Batchei, Pyotr."

When he heard his name pronounced in full, sounding so strange and forbidding in that bare, echoing classroom, Petya felt as if someone had punched him in the pit of the stomach. He had never dreamt the terrifying moment would come so soon.

Taken completely by surprise, he turned a fiery red and almost fainted as he walked across the slippery floor to the table.

Each of the three boys was turned over to an examiner.

Petya fell to the priest.

"Well, now," drawled the huge old man, rolling back the wide sleeves of his cassock.

Then he pressed against his narrow chest the dagger of a crucifix hanging from his neck on a silver chain. The chain was made of flat links with grooves like those in coffee beans.

"Come closer, son. What is your name?"

"Petya."

"Not Petya but Pyotr, my dear boy. You left Petya at home. And your last name?"

"Batchei."

"The son of Vasili Petrovich who teaches in the trade school?"

"Yes."

The priest leaned back in his chair in the dreamy attitude of a man smoking.

He squinted at Petya with an ironical smile that the boy did not understand, and said, "I know him, I should say so. A gentleman of liberal views. Well, now —" He pushed himself still farther back in the little chair until it swayed on its two hind legs.

"Which prayers do you know? Do you know the Creed?"

"Yes, I do."

"Recite it."

Petya filled his lungs with air and began to rattle off the Creed without any punctuation stops, trying to get it all out in one breath:

"I believe in God the Father maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible and in one Lord Jesus Christ—"

Here Petya ran out of breath and came to a stop.

Hurrying lest the priest think he had forgotten the end, he took a fresh gulp of air with a sob, but the priest waved his hand in alarm.

"That will do, that will do. Go to the next examiner."

Now Petya stood in front of the mathematics examiner.

"How high can you count up to?"

"As high as you like," Petya replied, emboldened by his triumph in religion.

"Excellent. Count up to a million."

Petya felt as if he had fallen through a hole in the ice. Without realising it, he made a choked, gasping sound. He looked round desperately for help, but everybody was busy, and the mathematics examiner was gazing to the side through his glasses, in whose curved lenses were distinctly reflected the two big classroom windows and beyond them the trees of the Gymnasium garden, the blue cupolas of the St. Panteleimon Church and even the watch tower of the Alexandrovsky fire station, on which hung two black balls showing that there was a fire in the second precinct.

Count up to a million! Petya was lost. Bravely he began, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. . ." stealthily crooking his fingers and smiling sheepishly and sadly. "Eight, nine, ten, eleven. . . ."

The mathematics examiner gazed impassively out of the window.

"That will do," he said when the dispirited boy reached seventy-nine. "Do you know the multiplication table?"

"Once one makes one, once two makes two, once three makes three," Petya began in a loud, quick voice, afraid of being stopped. But the examiner nodded his head. "That will do."

"I know addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, too!"

"That will do. Go to the next examiner." Why, they wouldn't even let you open your mouth! It wasn't fair.

The next examiner had a long, wispy beard through which a shiny medal could be seen. "Read from here."

Petya reverentially took the book with the marbled-paper cover, staring at the thick yellow fingernail that lay across the big letters of the title, *The Lion and the Dog*.

"The Lion and the Dog," Petya began at a smart pace, although stuttering a bit from excitement. "The Lion and the Dog. There was once a lion who lived in a menagerie. He was very ferocious. The keepers were afraid of him. The lion ate a great deal of meat. The owner of the menagerie did not know what to do—" "That's enough."

Petya almost burst into tears. How could that be "enough" when he hadn't even reached the dog! "Do you know any poems by heart?"

This was the moment Petya secretly had been waiting for. It would be a triumph. Now he would shine in all his glory!

"I know *The Sail*, by M. Y. Lermontov."

"Recite it, please."

"With expression?"

"Very well."

"Just a minute."

Petya quickly put one foot forward (this was absolutely necessary when reciting with expression) and flung back his head.

"The Sail, by M. Y. Lermontov!" he announced in a sing-song voice.

A white sail gleams, so far and lonely,
Through the blue haze above the foam.
What does it seek in distant harbours'?
What is it fleeing from at home?

He quickly spread his arms in a gesture of surprise and puzzlement and then continued, hurrying to get in as much as he could before he was stopped:

The billows run; the breezes play
About the mast that dips and creaks;
It is not joy the wand'rer flees from,
Nor is it happiness he seeks.

Petya hastily emphasised the words "It is not" with a gesture, but the examiner waved his hand in good time.

"That's enough."

"I'll finish in another moment. There's only a little bit left," the boy begged.

Below, the sea is crystal azure. . . .

"That's quite enough. You may go home."

"Don't I have to recite anything else? I know A. S. Pushkin's *The Lay of Oleg the Wise"*

"No, nothing more. You may tell your parents that you have been accepted. That is all."

Petya was dumbfounded. For a minute or two he stood in the middle of the classroom not knowing what to do next.

It seemed absolutely unbelievable that this mysterious and terrifying event for which he had prepared so anxiously all summer long was already over.

At last he gave a clumsy click of the heels, stumbled, and ran out of the classroom. A second later he dashed back like a madman.

"May I buy my Gymnasium cap now?" he asked, his voice breaking with excitement.

"Certainly. You may go."

Petya burst into the reception room where Auntie Tatyana, wearing a summer hat with a veil and long gloves, sat on a gilt chair beneath a plaster-of-Paris bust of Lomonosov.

"Auntie Tatyana!" he shouted in a voice that must have carried to the coachmen in the street. "Hurry up! They told me to buy my Gymnasium cap straightaway!"

29

THE ALEXANDROVSKY POLICE STATION

Oh, the bliss of buying that cap!

First they tried on cap after cap until the proper fit was found, then they bargained, and after that they chose the badge, a beautiful thing of silver. It consisted of two thorny branches, crossed, with "O. 5 G.", the monogram of the Odessa Fifth Gymnasium, between them.

The badge they chose was the largest and the cheapest. It cost fifteen kopeks.

With an awl the clerk punched two holes in the stiff blue beaver-cloth band of the cap and attached the badge, bending back the brass tabs on the inside.

At home the cap and badge caused a furore. Everyone wanted to handle it, but this Petya would not allow. They could look all they wanted, but hands off!

Everyone—Father, Dunya, Pavlik—kept asking, "What did it cost?" As if that was what mattered!

"A ruble forty-five, and fifteen kopeks for the badge," he said, fuming. "But that's nothing! You should have seen how I passed the exam!"

Pavlik stared at the cap with envious eyes and snuffled, ready at any moment to burst into tears.

Then Petya ran downstairs to the shop to show his cap to Nusya Kogan. But Nusya had again gone off to the bay on a visit. What luck!

However, Nusya's father, the shopkeeper, nicknamed Izzy the Dizzy, showed great interest in the cap.

He put on his spectacles and examined it a long time from all sides, saying *ts-ts-ts* all the while, until finally he came out with, "What did it cost?"

After making the round of all his acquaintances in the house Petya went out into the field and showed his cap to the soldiers. They also asked how much it had cost. Now not even half the day was over, and there was no one else to show the cap to!

Petya was in despair.

All at once he caught sight of Gavrik walking past the fence of the maternity hospital. He ran to him, filling the air with shouts and waving his cap.

But good God! What had happened to Gavrik? There were brown circles under his eyes—angry eyes in a thin, unwashed face. His shirt was in shreds. One ear was swollen and purplish-red. It was the first thing that struck the eye, and it looked so horrible and unreal that Petya felt frightened.

"You should have seen me in the exam!" he wanted to shout but the words died on his lips.

Instead he whispered, "Oh! You've been in a fight? Who gave you that ear?"

Gavrik lowered his eyes and smiled grimly.

"Let's see it," he said, stretching out his hand for the cap. "What did it cost?"

Although the idea of anyone handling the cap was agonising, Petya (true, with a wrench of his heart) gave it to Gavrik.

"But don't mess it up."

"No fear."

The boys sat down beside a bush near the rubbish-heap and proceeded to give the cap a thorough examination.

Gavrik at once discovered that it had dozens of secrets and possibilities which had escaped Petya's notice.

In the first place, it appeared that the thin steel hoop which stretched the top could be taken out. The hoop was pasted over with rust-stained paper, and once pulled out of the cap it had independent value.

It would be the easiest thing in the world to break the hoop into a great number of little pieces of steel which, if no good for anything else, could be put on the rails in front of a suburban train—simply to see what would happen.

In the second place, there was a black sateen lining with the inscription "Guralnik Bros." stamped in gold. All one had to do was rip open the edge, and then all kinds of things could be hidden inside where nobody would ever find them.

In the third place, the black varnish on the leather peak could be made still more shiny by a good rubbing with the green pods of what was known among boys as the "varnish-tree".

As to the badge, it immediately had to be bent back according to the fashion, and its branches clipped a bit.

The boys set to work without losing a moment's time. They kept at it industriously until they had squeezed out all the enjoyment the cap was capable of giving.

This distracted Gavrik for a time.

But when the cap no longer resembled anything under the sun and had lost its attractions, Gavrik again grew glum.

"Listen, Petya, fetch me some bread and a couple of lumps of sugar," he said suddenly, making his voice gruff. "I'll take it to Grandpa."

"But why? Where is he?"

"In the police station."

Petya stared at his friend with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

Gavrik smiled grimly and spat on the ground.

"Come on, what are you gaping for? Wasn't that clear enough for you? What are you, a baby? They took Grandpa to the police station yesterday. I've got to bring him something to eat."

Still Petya did not understand.

He had heard that drunkards, brawlers, thieves and tramps were locked up in the police station. But Gavrik's Grandpa? That was more than he could grasp.

Petya knew the old man very well, for he had often visited Gavrik at the beach.

How many times had Grandpa taken him out together with Gavrik to catch bullheads! How many times had he treated Petya to his very special, fragrant, smoky tea, always apologising, "But there's no sugar!" How many times had he made a sinker for Petya and shown him how to attach it to his fishing line!

What funny Ukrainian proverbs he knew—proverbs to fit every possible occasion—how many stories about the Turkish war, how many soldiers' jokes!

He would sit there with his legs crossed under him like a Turk, mending his nets with a wooden needle especially whittled for that purpose, and tell stories without end. The boys would laugh so hard their insides ached. He would tell the story of the soldier who boiled his axe, and of the bombardier who went to heaven, and of the orderly who so cleverly tricked his drunken officer.

Never in his life had Petya known such a delightful host, one who was always glad to tell a story but who could listen to others with pleasure too.

When Petya let his imagination run wild and, waving his arms, told such a tall story that a person's ears began to tingle, Grandpa never turned a hair. He would sit there, nodding gravely, and remark, "All quite possible. Might very easily have happened."

And a man like that had been locked up! It was unbelievable!

"But why? What for?"

"Because."

Gavrik gave a deep, grown-up sigh. He was silent for a while. Then he quickly leaned close to his friend. "Listen," he whispered mysteriously.

He proceeded to tell Petya what had happened the night before.

To be sure, he did not tell the whole story. He said not a .word about the sailor or Terenti. The way he told it, three strange men who were running away from the police had come into their hut at night to hide. The rest of the story was the truth.

"Then that snake grabbed me by the ear, and I'll say he twisted it!"

"Oh, I'd have given it to him! I'd have shown him!" Petya shouted, his eyes flashing. "I'd have given him a good lesson!"

"Oh, shut up!" Gavrik said glumly. He took a firm grip on the peak of Petya's cap and yanked it down over his face so that his ears jutted out.

This accomplished, Gavrik went on with his story. Petya listened in horror.

"But who were they?" he asked when Gavrik had finished. "Robbers?"

" 'Course not. I told you they were just ordinary men. Committee men."

"What kind you say?"

"Might as well talk to a post as tell you something! Committee men, I tell you. From the Committee."

Gavrik leaned still closer and said in a whisper that brought a smell of onions to Petya's nostrils:

"The ones who make strikes. From the Party. See?"

"But why did the policemen beat Grandpa and lock him up?"

Gavrik smiled scornfully.

"Because he hid them, stupid! Where are your brains? They'd have taken me too only they can't because I'm a kid. You know what you get for hiding somebody? It's terrible! But—"

Gavrik glanced round and said in a whisper so low that Petya could hardly make it out:

"But you wait and see—he won't stay there more than a week. Soon they'll go through the whole city raiding the police stations. They'll throw every single one of those snakes into the Black Sea. May I never see a happy day in all my life! By the true and holy Cross!"

Gavrik again spat on the ground. "Well, how about it?" he said in a businesslike tone.

Petya raced home. Two minutes later he returned with six lumps of sugar in his pocket and half of a wheaten loaf inside his sailor blouse.

"That'll do," Gavrik said, counting the lumps and weighing the bread in his hand. "Coming to the police station with me?"

The police station, it goes without saying, was definitely out of bounds, near though it was. As luck would have it, Petya was suddenly filled with such a desire to go to the police station that to describe it would be impossible.

Again there was a fierce struggle with his conscience, a struggle that lasted all the way to the police station.

Conscience finally won out, but too late, for the boys were already there.

When Petya was with Gavrik, things and conceptions always lost their usual aspect and revealed no end of qualities that previously had been hidden from him. Near Mills was transformed from a sad abode of widows and orphans into a workers' settlement with purple irises in the front gardens; a

policeman became a snake; a cap turned out to have a steel hoop in it.

And now the police station.

What had it been in Petya's mind up until now? A big government building on the corner of Richelieu and Novorybnaya streets, opposite the St. Panteleimon Church. Many was the time he had ridden past it on the horse-tram.

The most important part of that building was its tall square tower with the little fireman up at the top. Day and night the fireman, in a sheepskin coat, walked round the mast on the small balcony, gazing out over the city. Every time Petya looked at the mast, which had a crossbar, it reminded him of a pair of scales or a trapeze. There were always several ominous-looking black balls hanging from it, and their number showed in which section of the city there was a fire. The city was so big that there was certain to be a fire somewhere.

At the foot of the tower stood the headquarters of the Odessa fire brigade. It consisted of a row of huge wrought -iron gates.

To the blare of bugles, teams of four wild dapple-greys would fly through the gates one after the other, their snow-white manes and tails streaming.

The red fire-engines, sinister and yet somehow toy-like, sped down the street accompanied by the steady jangle of the bell. They left behind them in the air orange tongues of flame from the torches, whose light was reflected in the firemen's brass helmets. The

spectre of misfortune would rise to haunt the careless city.

Apart from that, the police station was in no way remarkable in Petya's eyes.

But the minute Gavrik came near, it turned about, as though by the touch of a magic wand, and showed the barred windows of a prison looking out into an alley.

The police station, it appeared, was simply a prison.

"Wait here," said Gavrik.

He ran across the damp pavement and slipped through the gate unnoticed by the policeman. Here, too, it appeared, Gavrik knew his way about.

Petya remained alone in a small crowd opposite the police station. The people were relatives, and they were talking across the street with the men in the jail.

Petya had never thought so many people could be sitting in the jail. There were at least a hundred of them.

But they were hardly "sitting". Some stood on the windowsills, clinging to the bars of the open windows; others looked out from behind them, waving their hands; still others jumped up and down trying to see the street over the heads and the shoulders.

To Petya's amazement there were neither thieves nor drunkards nor tramps among them. Just the opposite: plain, ordinary and quite respectable people, like those to be seen every day near the station, in Langeron, in Alexandrovsky Park, or riding in the horse-tram. There were even a few university students. One of them stood out especially because of the black

Caucasian felt cloak he wore over a white tunic with gold buttons. Cupping his hands close to his haggard cheeks, he shouted to someone in the crowd in a deafening, guttural voice: "Tell the association that last night Comrades Lordkipanidze, Krasikov, and Burevoi were summoned from their cells and told to take their belongings with them. Lordkipanidze, Krasikov, and Burevoi! Last night! Organise a public protest! Regards to the comrades!"

From another window a man who reminded Petya of Terenti, in a jacket and a Russian blouse with the collar unfastened, shouted: "Tell Seryozha to go to the office and collect my pay!"

Other voices rang out, interrupting one another:

"Don't trust Afanasyev! Do you hear? Don't trust Afanasyev!"

"Kolka's in the Bulvarny jail!"

"In a box behind the wardrobe at Pavel Ivanich's!"

"Wednesday at the latest!"

The relatives shouted too, raising packages and children over their heads.

One of the women held up a girl with earrings just like Motya's.

"Don't worry about us!" she cried. "People are helping us out! We have enough to eat! See how healthy our Verochka looks."

Now and then the policeman approached the crowd, gripping the scabbard of his sword with both hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you are asked not to stand opposite the windows and not to talk to the prisoners."

His words would immediately be followed by deafening cat-calls, unbelievable swearing and roars from the windows. Water-melon rinds, corn-cobs and cucumbers would fly at the policeman.

"You snake!"

"Gendarme!"

"Go and fight the Japs!"

With his sword under his arm the policeman would stroll unhurriedly back to the gate, pretending that nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

No, things in the world were definitely not going as smoothly as they might seem at first glance!

Gavrik returned downcast and angry.

"Did you see Grandpa?"

Gavrik did not reply. The boys walked away. Near the railway station Gavrik halted.

"They beat him every day," he said in a hollow voice, wiping his eyes with his ragged sleeve. "See you later."

He turned away.

"Where are you going?"

"To Near Mills."

Petya made his way home across Kulikovo Field. The wind whipped up clouds of dry and dreary dust.

The boy's heart was so heavy that even the flattened cartridge-case he found on the way brought him no joy.

30

THE PREPARATORY CLASS

Autumn came.

Petya was now attending the Gymnasium. The school uniform had transformed him from a tall, sunburned, long-legged boy in lisle stockings into a small, crop-haired, lop-eared preparatory class pupil—in Gymnasium slang, a "greenie".

The long trousers and uniform jacket, bought for thirty-six rubles at Landesman's Clothing Establishment, were baggy and highly uncomfortable. The coarse collar chafed his tender neck accustomed to the freedom of a sailor blouse.

Even the belt, a real Gymnasium belt with a German silver buckle, which had come after the cap in Petya's dreams, fell short of expectations. It kept creeping up towards his armpits, the buckle slipped to one side, and the free end dangled like a tongue.

The belt did not give his figure the manliness on which he had so strongly counted. It was nothing more than a constant source of humiliation, calling forth rude laughter from the grown-ups.

On the other hand, a joy as great as it was unexpected came during the buying of the copybooks, textbooks and writing materials.

What a difference between the quiet, serious book shop and the light-minded, silly shops in Richelieu Street or the Arcade! It was probably an even more

serious shop than the chemist's. At any rate, it was much more intellectual.

The sign alone, a narrow, modest sign which said

EDUCATION

was enough to inspire the deepest respect.

It was on a dark autumn evening that Petya's father took him to the "Education" shop.

They entered a drowsy realm of book-backs which in the light of the gas jets had a greenish tinge and a sort of university flavour. On top of them stood the painted heads of members of the four human races: the Red, the Yellow, the Black, and the White.

The first three heads conformed exactly to the races they were supposed to represent. The Indian was as red as could be. The Chinese as yellow as a lemon. The Negro blacker than pitch. The only one not entirely true to his name was the specimen of the "master race": he was not white but a delicate pink, with a long blond beard. Petya stared enchanted at the blue globes with their brass meridians, the black star charts, and the terrifying, startlingly bright anatomical charts.

All the wisdom of .the universe was concentrated in this shop, and it seemed to penetrate into the very pores of the customer. Petya, for one, felt remarkably well educated as he came home in the horse-tram, although they had spent no more than ten minutes in

the shop and had bought five little books in all, the thickest costing only forty-two kopeks.

They had also bought a real satchel of calf-leather with the fur on the outside and a small lunch basket.

Then they had chosen a wonderful pencil-case with a transfer picture on its sliding lacquered top. The top fit so tightly that when it was opened it squeaked like a wooden peasant toybox. Petya put a great deal of care and taste into filling all the sections of the case with the proper articles, making a point of it that none remained empty.

All kinds of nibs went into the case: blue nibs with three holes in them, "Cossodo", "Rondo", "No. 86", "Pushkin" nibs with the curly head of the famous poet on them, and many others.

Then there was an india-rubber with an elephant drawn on it, a crayon, two pencils, one for writing and the other for drawing, a penknife with a mother-of-pear] handle, an expensive penholder (it cost 20 kopeks), and coloured pasting tabs, drawing pins, pins and pictures.

And all these small, elegant implements of study were so absolutely new, so shiny, and smelled so delightfully!

The whole evening Petya industriously covered his books and copybooks with special blue paper, pasting down the edges with tabs.

He pasted lacy pictures in the corners of his blotters; glossy bouquets and angels firmy held silk ribbons in place.

On all the copybooks he neatly printed:

This Copybook Is the Property
of P. BATCHEI
Preparatory Class Pupil, 0. 5 G.

He could hardly wait for morning to come. It was still almost dark and the lamp was burning at home when the boy ran off to the Gymnasium equipped from head to foot as if off to the wars.

Now not a single department of learning would be able to withstand Petya's onslaught! Three weeks of incredible patience, both at home and at the Gymnasium, went into improving his scholastic equipment. Time and again he repasted his pictures, replaced the covers on his textbooks and changed the nibs in his pencil-case, striving for the height of beauty and perfection.

And when Auntie Tatyana remarked, "Hadn't you better do your lessons?" Petya would groan in despair, "Oh, Auntie Tatyana, don't talk such nonsense! How can I study when nothing is properly ready?"

In a word, things were going splendidly.

There was only one cloud to darken the joy of learning: not once had Petya been called upon to recite, and there was not a single mark in his report-book. Nearly all the boys in the class had been marked, but not Petya.

Each Saturday he sorrowfully brought home his unmarked report-book, sumptuously wrapped in pink

paper, pasted over with gold and silver stars and seals, and decorated with coloured book-marks. But then came the Saturday when Petya dashed into the dining-room, his coat still on, his face aglow. He waved his handsome report-book in the air, shouting at the top of his lungs, "Auntie Tatyana! Pavlik! Dunya! Come quick! I've got marks! Oh, what a pity Daddy's still at school!"

Triumphantly he tossed his report-book on the table and then stepped away in modest pride, so as not to interfere with their contemplation of his marks.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Auntie, running into the dining-room with a dress-pattern in her hand. "Let's see your marks."

She picked up the report-book and quickly scanned it.

"Religion—Poor; Russian—Poor; arithmetic—Unsatisfactory; attention—Satisfactory; diligence—Fair," she read in surprise. She shook her head reproachfully. "I don't see what you're so happy about. Nothing but Poors here."

Petya stamped his foot in annoyance.

"I knew it!" he cried, fairly weeping from resentment. "Why can't you understand, Auntie Tatyana? The important thing is that there are marks! *Marks*, don't you see?

But you simply don't want to understand! It's always that way!"

Petya angrily snatched up his treasured report-book and ran outside to show his marks to the boys.

With this ended the first stage of Petya's studies—the festive period. It was followed by cheerless, humdrum days of cramming.

Gavrik stopped coming to see him, and Petya, busy with his Gymnasium studies, almost forgot his existence.

For a time, Gavrik, too, forgot Petya's existence. He was living at Near Mills now, with Terenti.

Grandpa was still in prison. He was kept part of the time in the Alexandrovsky jail and the other part in the Secret Police Department, to which he was often driven at night by carriage. It was evident that the old man knew how to hold his tongue, for the police were not disturbing Terenti.

Exactly where the sailor was Gavrik did not know, and he did not think it necessary to ask Terenti. Certain signs, however, led him to conclude that the sailor was in safe hiding somewhere in the vicinity.

For were there not nooks and corners aplenty in Near Mills where a man might lie low, might vanish as in thin air? And were there not numbers of men who were lying low for the time being in the Near Mills district?

But Gavrik made it a rule never to stick his nose into other people's affairs. Besides, he had enough troubles of his own.

Terenti's family was having a hard time making ends meet. The railway workers were on strike almost all the time. Terenti made a little money by doing odd locksmith's jobs at home, but there were not many of

those jobs and, besides, a good deal of his time was taken up by urgent matters which were only hinted at in the family circle.

Terenti did not seem to belong to himself. Men would come for him in the middle of the night, and without saying a word he would dress and go off, sometimes for days.

People were always arriving at the house. The teakettle had to be put on for them and gruel prepared. There were always muddy tracks in the passage those autumn days; the room was filled with clouds of cheap tobacco smoke.

Gavrik's conscience would not allow him to be a burden on his brother, who had a family to provide for, and so he had to make his own living. After all, he wasn't a child! Besides, he had to have food to take to Grandpa in jail. Fishing, of course, was out of the question without Grandpa. Then, too, the weather had turned bad, with storms blowing every other day.

Gavrik went down to the beach, hauled the boat over to a neighbour's, and hung the padlock on the door of the hut.

From morning to night he now wandered about the city in Terenti's old boots, looking for ways of earning his daily bread. Begging would of course have been the easiest way out. But Gavrik was ready to die rather than stretch out a hand for alms. The very thought of it made his fisherman's blood boil.

No! He was accustomed to earning his bread by working. He carried cooks' baskets home from the

market for two kopeks. He helped the loaders at the Odessa Goods Station. He would run to the spirits shop to get vodka for coachmen who, under penalty of a fine, were not allowed to leave their horses.

When he was hungry and unable to find work of any kind, he would go to the cemetery chapel and wait for a burial, in order to receive in his cap a handful of *kolevo,* that funeral dish of cooked rice sprinkled with powdered sugar and decorated with lilac-coloured sweets.

The distribution of *kolevo* at funeral was an old custom, and the cemetery beggars took advantage of it. Some of them even grew fat on it. But since *kolevo* was eaten not only by the beggars but by all who attended the funeral, Gavrik did not feel it beneath him to take advantage of so convenient a custom. The more so since the sweets he came by could be taken to Terenti's children as gifts—and without gifts Gavrik did not feel it proper to return home for the night.

Sometimes Terenti asked him to take a parcel to an address that had to be learned by heart and could under no circumstances be put down on paper. Gavrik liked these errands very much, for they clearly had some connection with the affairs that kept Terenti so busy.

The parcel, usually a roll of papers, Gavrik would thrust deep down in his pocket and then press flat so that it did not show. He knew that if he was caught he was to say he had found it.

After finding the person for whom it was intended he had to be sure to say at first, "How do you do?

Sophia Ivanovna sends you her regards." The person would reply, "How is Sophia Ivanovna's health?" Only then could he hand over the parcel. Very often the person, after taking the parcel, would give him a whole ten-kopek piece "for tram fare".

How much terror and fun there was in those errands!

Finally, Gavrik earned money by playing "lugs", a game that had recently come into fashion not only among children but among adults as well. Lugs was the name given to the buttons from uniforms worn by government employees, with the links bent in.

In broad outline, the game went as follows: the players put their lugs on the ground, wrong side up, and then, one after the other, threw their king-lug at them, the object being to make the lugs turn right side up. Every time a player managed to turn over a lug it became his.

Lugs was neither more difficult nor more interesting than any other street game, but it had a devilish attraction all its own: the lugs cost money. They could always be bought and sold, and they were quoted at definite rates on the street exchange.

Gavrik played a brilliant game of lugs. His throw was firm and accurate, and his eye was keen. He soon became famous as a champion player. His pouch was always filled with superior, expensive lugs. When affairs took an especially bad turn he would sell a part of his supply.

But his pouch never remained empty. The very next day he would win even more lugs than he had sold.

What to others was an amusement thus became, for Gavrik, a profitable trade. There was no other way out. One had to make a living somehow.

31

THE BOX ON THE GUN CARRIAGE

Big events were approaching. Seemingly at a snail's pace, but actually with the terrifying speed of an express train.

How well did Gavrik, a resident of Near Mills, know that feeling of awaiting the flying express train!

. . .The train is still far away, neither to be seen nor heard, but the steady tinkling of the signal bell at the Odessa Goods Station announced its approach. The line is clear. The arm of the semaphore is raised. The rails are shiny and immobile. There is not a sound. But everyone now knows that the train is coming and that no power on earth can stop it.

At the crossing, the barrier slowly drops. The boys scramble up on the station fence. A flock of birds takes off from the trees in alarm and circles above the water tower. From up there they can probably see the train already.

Out of the distance comes the faint sound of a pointsman's horn. And now into the silence there

trickles the faintest of noises. No, not a noise but rather its presentiment, a delicate quivering of the rails as they fill with inaudible sound. There is this quivering, then a sound, and then a noise.

Now the train can clearly be heard: it is slowly breathing out steam, and each breath is louder than the one before it.

All the same, it is hard to believe that the express will be flying past in another minute. But then suddenly, unexpectedly, the engine, enveloped in a cloud of steam, comes into sight ahead. It seems to be standing still at the end of the avenue of green trees.

Yes, it must have stopped.

But if so, why is it growing so enormously bigger with each instant? However, now there is no longer time to answer the question.

Belching steam sidewise, the express flies past in a dizzying whirlwind of wheels, windows, doors, steps, couplings, buffers. . . .

Gavrik, who spent his days roaming through the city, could not but be aware of the approach of events. They were still somewhere on the way—halfway between St. Petersburg and Odessa, perhaps—but into the silence of expectation there was already trickling the sound of irresistible movement, not so much heard as sensed.

Swaying on their new crutches, the wounded, their faces overgrown with beards, hobbled along the streets. They wore shaggy Manchurian fur caps and the

St. George Cross was pinned to the army coats slung over their shoulders.

Factory workers who arrived from Central Russia brought rumours of a general strike. In the crowds near the police stations there was talk of violence. In the crowds near the university and the women's college there was talk of freedom. In the crowds near the Ghen factory there was talk of an armed uprising.

On a day in late September a big white ship steamed into the harbour carrying the body of General Kondratenko, who had been killed at Port Arthur.

For almost a year the huge box, containing a leaden coffin and weighing nearly a ton, had travelled foreign lands and seas before it finally reached its homeland.

In the port it was placed on a gun carriage and driven along the broad avenues of Odessa to the railway station.

Gavrik watched the sombre procession. The pale September sun fell on the funeral vestments of the priests, on the cavalry, the police in white gloves, the crepe ribbons on the street gas lamps.

Torch-bearers in black three-cornered hats edged with silver carried glass lanterns on poles, and the pale flames of the candles could scarcely be seen in the daylight.

Army bands played uninterruptedly but with painful slowness, their music mingling with the chanting of the cathedral choir.

Harmonious but so insufferably high as to be almost shrill, the melancholy children's voices floated up

tremulously to the arches of wilted acacia trees. Pale sunshine filtered through the lilac clouds of incense. Slowly—oh, so slowly!—the gun carriage, and the huge black box covered with wreaths and ribbons high on top of it, moved down the middle of Pushkin Street between lines of soldiers towards the railway station.

As the procession came level with the garden in front of the station a university student sprang up on the iron fence. Waving above his shaggy head a faded student cap with a band that had once been blue, he shouted: "Comrades!"

In that vast silent crowd his voice seemed weak, scarcely audible. But the word he had shouted —"Comrades"—was so incredible, so unfamiliar, so challenging that it was heard by all, and every single head turned in the direction of the little figure clinging to the massive fence.

"Comrades! Remember Port Arthur! Remember Tsushima! Remember the bloodshed of January the 9th. The Tsar and his underlings have brought Russia to unbelievable shame, to unprecedented ruin and poverty! But the great Russian people carry on and will continue to carry on! Down with the autocracy!"

Policemen had already laid hands on the student but he clung to the fence and, waving his cap, shouted quickly, frenziedly, determined to finish his speech:

"Down with the autocracy! Long live liberty! Long live the re—"

Gavrik saw him dragged down and led away. The tolling of bells floated over the city. The hoofs of the cavalry horses clattered on the pavement.

General Kondratenko's coffin was placed in a funeral carriage of the St. Petersburg train. The bands crashed into their final notes. "Pre-sent a-a-arms!" The train pulled out.

Slowly the funeral carriage sailed past the fence of gleaming bayonets held at attention, carrying the black box with the cross on the lid past the Odessa Goods Station, past the suburbs sprinkled with motionless crowds, past the silent stations and flag-stations—moving across the whole of Russia, northwards to St. Petersburg. Together with this train of sorrow, the spectre of the lost war moved across Russia.

During those few days it seemed to Petya as if there had been a death in the house. Everyone walked about softly. No one spoke much. A crumpled handkerchief lay on Auntie Tatyana's toilet table. Immediately after dinner Father silently put a green shade over the lamp and sat correcting copybooks until late at night, every now and then dropping his pince-nez and polishing the lenses with the lining of his jacket.

Petya became a quiet lad. Instead of the circles and cones of his homework he sketched in his drawing-book the Battle of Turenchen and the sharp-nosed cruiser *Retvizan* surrounded by fountains of water from exploding Japanese mines. Pavlik alone was irrepressible. He would harness Kudlatka to a chair turned upside down and, blowing furiously on a

painted tin horn, drag "Kondratenko's funeral" up and down the passage.

As he was getting ready for bed one night, Petya heard the voices of Father and Auntie Tatyana from the dining-room.

"Life is unbearable, simply unbearable!" Auntie Tatyana was saying through her nose, as though she had a cold, although Petya knew very well she didn't.

He paused to listen.

"It's literally impossible to breathe!" Auntie Tatyana went on, tears in her voice. "Really, don't you feel it, Vasili Petrovich? In their place I'd be ashamed to look people in the face. But they—my God!—they act as if everything were as it should be. I was walking down the French Boulevard and I couldn't believe my eyes. A gorgeous turnout: dapple-grey trotters, a landau driven by a soldier wearing white gloves. All glitter and dazzle. In the carriage sat two ladies in white nurses' caps with red crosses, in velvet and sable cloaks, with diamonds this size on their fingers, and lorgnettes, and painted eyebrows, and eyes shining from belladonna. Opposite them were two elegant adjutants, their swords like mirrors, and with cigarette holders between their glistening white teeth. And oh how gay and merry! Now, who do you think they were? Madam Caulbars and her daughter driving out to Arcadia with their admirers, while all Russia is literally drenched in blood and tears! What do you say to that? Just think of it—diamonds that size! And where did they get them? They stole and robbed, and stuffed their pockets! Ugh,

how I hate all that—forgive my frankness—all that scum! While three-quarters of the country are starving; while entire districts are dying out.

I can't stand it any longer! I haven't the strength! Can't you see?"

Petya heard passionate sobbing.

"Calm yourself, Tatyana Ivanovna. But what can we do? What can we do?"

"How should I know? Protest, demand, shout, go into the streets—"

"I beg you—I understand—but tell me, what can we do?"

"What can we do?" Auntie Tatyana exclaimed suddenly in a high, clear voice. "Everything! If we only want to and aren't afraid. We can tell the scoundrel to his face that he is a scoundrel, the thief that he is a thief, the coward that he is a coward. But instead we stay at home and keep silent. My God, my God, it's horrible to think of what unfortunate Russia has come to! Stupid generals, stupid ministers, a stupid Tsar."

"Please, Tatyana Ivanovna, the children will hear!"

"Splendid! Let them know the kind of country they live in. They'll thank us for it later. Let them know that their Tsar is a fool and a drunkard, who's been beaten over the head with a bamboo cane, besides. A degenerate! And the finest men in the country, the most honest, the most educated, the cleverest, are rotting in prison, in penal servitude—"

Father tiptoed into the nursery to see if the boys were asleep. Petya closed his eyes and breathed deeply

and evenly. Father bent over him, kissed him on the cheek with trembling lips, and tiptoed out of the room, closing the door tight behind him.

But the voices filtered in from the dining-room for a long time.

Petya could not fall asleep. Back and forth across the ceiling moved bars of light from the street. Hoofs clattered. The windows rattled faintly.

It seemed to the boy that the glittering landau of Madam Caulbars, the woman who had stolen so much money and so many diamonds from the treasury (the treasury was a wrought-iron box on wheels), was driving back and forth beneath the window.

32

FOG

That evening, many things Petya had never before suspected were revealed to him.

Before, there had been certain conceptions so well known and so indisputable that there was never any reason to think about them.

For example, Russia. It had always been perfectly clear and indisputable that Russia was the best, the strongest, and the most beautiful country in the world. How, otherwise, could one explain the fact that they lived in Russia?

Or Father. Father was the cleverest, the kindest, the most manly, and the most educated person in the world.

Or the Tsar. The Tsar was the Tsar. It went without saying that the Tsar was the wisest, the richest, and the most powerful man in the world. How, otherwise, could one explain the fact that Russia belonged to him and not to some other tsar or king, say the French king?

And then, of course, there was God. About him absolutely nothing had to be said because everything was so clear.

But now? It suddenly turned out that Russia was unfortunate, that besides Father there were others who were the finest men in the country and were rotting in penal servitude, that the Tsar was a fool and a drunkard and, besides, had been beaten over the head with a bamboo cane. On top of all that, the ministers were stupid, the generals were stupid, and it turned out that Russia had not defeated Japan—although up until now there had not been the slightest doubt that it had—but just the opposite.

But the main thing was that it was Father and Auntie Tatyana who had been talking about all this. Lately, though, Petya had begun to suspect a thing or two himself.

Decent, sober folk were put in jail. The police had even locked up a wonderful old man like Gavrik's grandfather, and were beating him, what's more. The sailor had jumped off the ship. Soldiers had stopped

the coach. There were guards posted at the port. The trestle bridge had burnt down. A battleship had shelled the city.

No, it was quite obvious that life was not at all the gay, pleasant, carefree thing it had been just the very shortest while ago.

Petya was dying to ask Auntie Tatyana who had beaten the Tsar over the head with a bamboo cane, and why. Especially, why with a bamboo cane? But he already understood that there were things better not spoken of, that it was better to keep silent and pretend to know nothing. The more so since Auntie remained her good-natured, bantering, competent self, in no way showing the feelings she had so openly revealed on that one evening.

October was approaching.

The acacia trees were almost bare of leaves. Storms raged at sea.

You had to have the lamp on when you got up and dressed.

For weeks at a time fog lay over the city. In the fog, people and trees looked like drawings on frosted glass.

Lamps put out at nine in the morning were lighted again at five in the afternoon. It drizzled. At times the rain stopped, the wind blew away the fog, and then a red dawn flamed for a long time in a sky as clear as ice, beyond the railway station, beyond the market, beyond the spikes of the fences, beyond the bare branches of the trees, thickly peppered with crows' nests as big and black as Manchurian fur caps.

Hands froze without gloves. The earth hardened. A terrifying emptiness and transparency hung over the garrets. In those brief hours silence reigned everywhere from earth to sky. The city was cut off from Kulikovo Field by the transparent wall of silence. It had moved infinitely far away, with its alarming rumours, its secrets, its anticipation of events to come. It was clearly visible, in sharp focus; at the same time it was dreadfully remote, as though seen through the wrong end of the opera-glasses.

But then the weather changed, the sky grew dark, and an impenetrable fog moved in from the sea. Nothing was visible two paces away. The dark, weird evening was followed by a black night.

A raw wind blew from the sea. From the port came the dark, awe-inspiring voice of the foghorn. It began with bass notes and then suddenly rose in a chromatic scale, at dizzying speed, to a penetrating but smooth wail of inhuman pitch. It was as if a death-dealing projectile were tearing through the murky sky with a blood-curdling wail.

On such evenings Petya could not overcome a feeling of horror whenever he approached the window, opened the shutters, and looked out into the street.

The vast, wild expanse of Kulikovo Field was pitch-dark. It merged with the city in the foggy gloom, sharing its mysteries, mysteries that seemed to be stealing silently from street lamp to street lamp, muffled in fog.

The shadows of rare pedestrians glided past. Occasionally a policeman's whistle sounded, faint and long drawn out. A double watch of sentries was on duty at the Army Staff building. The heavy tread of a patrol came through the darkness.

There might be someone lying in wait at every corner. At any moment something might happen—something unforeseen and terrible.

One evening something actually did happen.

At about ten o'clock Dunya, who had gone to the shop for paraffin, came running into the dining-room, without taking off her shawl and said that five minutes ago a sentry had shot himself in the vacant lot, near the wall of the Army Staff building. She related the gory details: the soldier had taken off one of his boots, put the muzzle of his gun in his mouth, and then pulled the trigger with his big toe. The back of his head was blown off. Dunya stood there, pale as death, with ashen lips, nervously tying and untying a knot in the fringe of her woolly shawl.

"They say he didn't even leave a note," she said after a long silence. "That's awful. Probably he couldn't write."

Auntie Tatyana pressed her knuckles against her temples as hard as she could.

"Oh, why talk of a note!" she exclaimed, tears of vexation in her eyes. She laid her head on the table-cloth beside a saucer of tea in which the swaying dining-room lamp with its white shade was reflected in

every detail, but in miniature. "Why talk of a note! The thing is clear enough as it is!"

From the kitchen window, which looked out on the vacant lot, Petya watched the roaming lamps of an ambulance and the shadows of people.

The boy sat on the icy windowsill in the empty kitchen, trembling with fear and cold, his face pressed to the rain-washed windowpane. He was unable to tear his eyes away from the darkness, which still seemed to be filled with the presence of death.

That night Petya could not fall asleep for a long time. He kept seeing in his imagination the terrifying corpse of the barefoot soldier in full sentry kit, with the back of his head shattered and his face blue and mysteriously immobile.

But the next morning, despite the horror, he could not resist the temptation of having a look at the terrible spot.

An inexplicable force drew him to the vacant lot. On his way to the Gymnasium he turned off in that direction and cautiously, as though in church, tiptoed across the grass, wet and rotting from the rain and fog, up in the place where a few curious people were already standing.

Near the wall of the Army Staff building he saw, in the damp earth, a dent the size of a human head. It was full of rain water tinted pink. The dead soldier's head must have struck that spot.

That was the only trace of what had happened the evening before.

Petya raised the collar of his Gymnasium overcoat. Shivering from the dampness in the air, he stood for some time gazing at the dent. Suddenly he noticed a small disc on the ground near his feet. He picked it up and trembled with joy. It was a five-kopek piece, black and spotted, with a turquoise mould covering the place where the eagle should have been.

Naturally, the find was accidental and had no bearing whatsoever on what had taken place. The coin had probably lain there since summer. It may have been lost by factory workers playing pitch-and-toss, or it may have fallen out of the pocket of some beggar woman who spent the night in the bushes. However, the coin immediately acquired in the boy's eyes an importance bordering on the magic, and this besides the fact that here was wealth: an entire five kopeks!

Petya's father never gave him money, feeling that money might easily corrupt him. So that finding the five-kopek piece raised Petya to seventh heaven.

That day, magically brightened by the find, was one P long holiday for the boy.

In class the coin passed from hand to hand. Among Petya's classmates there were lads experienced in such matters, and they swore, turning towards the cupola of the St. Panteleimon Church and crossing themselves, that it was without any doubt a magic five-kopek piece, a younger brother of the magic ruble in the fairy-tale. It should bring Petya unbelievable riches, they said.

One of the boys even offered his lunch, together with his lunch basket and a penknife thrown in, in exchange for the talisman. Petya naturally refused with a scornful laugh. Only a total idiot would have agreed to such an exchange!

After school Petya raced home. He had to show his find to one and all at home and in the yard as soon as possible.

What was his joy when he saw Gavrik in the yard!

Gavrik was on his knees, surrounded by a group of squatting children. He was teaching them the popular game of lugs.

Petya hardly had time to give his friend, whom he had not seen for such a long time, a proper greeting before he was caught up by the game. First they played a trial game, using Gavrik's lugs. This merely fanned Petya's excitement.

"Gavrik, lend me ten of them," he begged, stretching out a hand that trembled with impatience. "As soon as I win I'll pay you back, by the true and holy Cross I will!"

"Hands off! I've heard that tale before," Gavrik replied darkly. He dropped the lugs into his grey baize pouch and neatly tied it with a piece of string. "Lugs aren't pictures. They cost money. I can sell you some if you like."

Petya did not take the slightest offence. He understood very well that friendship was one thing but that every game had its inviolable rules. Since lugs cost money you had to pay money for them, and friendship

had nothing to do with the matter. Such was the iron law of the street.

But what was he to do?

He was dying to play. A storm of indecision shook him. For no more than a minute he hesitated, then reached into his pocket and held out the famous five-kopek piece to Gavrik.

Gavrik gave the suspicious-looking coin a thorough examination and shook his head.

"Nobody'll take it."

"They will too!"

"No, they won't!"

"You're a fool!"

"You're another! Take it to the shop and change it!"

"Go yourself."

"Why should I! It's your money."

"They're your lugs."

"I don't care if you buy any or not."

"Neither do I."

Gavrik calmly put the bag in his pocket and spat indifferently far to one side through his teeth. At that Petya ran to the shop and asked to have his five-kopek piece changed. While Izzy the Dizzy held the suspicious coin up close to his weak eyes the boy lived through a score of the most humiliating emotions, chief among them the cowardly impatience of the thief selling stolen goods.

It wouldn't have surprised Petya at all if at that moment policemen with swords had marched into the

shop and dragged him off to the jail in a carriage for being a party to some secret and shameful crime.

At last Izzy the Dizzy threw the coin into the cashbox and carelessly tossed five one-kopek pieces on the scales. Petya rushed back to the yard, where Gavrik was now selling lugs to the other boys. Spending all his money, Petya bought several lugs of different denominations.

They began to play. Petya forgot everything in the world.

By the time darkness fell, Petya was left without a single lug. What made it still more awful was the fact that at the beginning he had had amazing luck—there had been no room in his pockets for all the lugs he had won.

But now, alas, he had neither money nor lugs.

Petya was close to tears. He was in the depths of despair. Gavrik took pity on his friend, and lent him two cheap lugs with which to recoup his losses. But Petya was too reckless and impatient, and within five minutes he had lost both. He was no match for Gavrik.

Gavrik carelessly dropped his fabulous winnings into his pouch and set off for home, saying that he would come again the next day.

33

LUGS

How many of them there were!

The fat student tens with superimposed eagles riveted on them. The golden officers' fives with the eagles embossed. The brown buttons of the commercial school with Mercury's wand entwined by snakes and with the cheeky little winged cap. The light-coloured mariners' buttons with crossed anchors. The post-and-telegraph ones with green streaks of lightning and bugles. The artillery men's buttons with guns on them. The lawyers' buttons with columns of laws. The brass livery buttons as big as a fifty-kopek piece and decorated with lions. The fat threes from civil servants' uniforms. The thin clerks' "lemons" which hummed like mosquitoes when they were struck during the game. The fat ordinary buttons from Gymnasium overcoats with silver-plated hollows rubbed red in the middle.

For one brief and happy moment all these fabulous treasures, the entire heraldry of the Russian Empire, were concentrated in Petya's hands.

His palms could still feel the different shapes of the lugs and their solid leaden weight, but now he was completely bankrupt, ruined, cast to the winds. Who had talked about a magic five-kopek piece?!

Lugs, and nothing but lugs—that was all Petya could think of now. They were constantly before his eyes, like the dream vision of a fortune. At the dinner table he gazed absently into his plate of soup, where at least three hundred tiny lamp-shades were reflected in

the globules of fat, but what he saw were three hundred sparkling lugs with golden eagles.

He looked in disgust at the buttons on his father's jacket. They were cloth-covered. Absolutely worthless.

In fact, today he had discovered that he lived in a poverty-stricken family; there was not a single decent button in the whole flat.

Auntie Tatyana immediately noticed her nephew's strange mood.

"What's the matter with you today?" she asked, examining Petya's unusually excited face with a searching glance. "The boys in the yard didn't go for you, by any chance?"

Petya shook his head angrily.

"Or is it poor marks in school again? If so, out with it, but don't sit there suffering."

"Leave me alone! I don't see why you all have to pick on me!"

"You aren't ill by any chance, are you?"

"Oh, lor'!"

Petya began to whimper at all this questioning.

"Very well. If you don't want to tell me you needn't. Suffer as much as you like."

Petya really was suffering. He was racking his brains for a way to get the money he needed for next day's game. He slept badly, tormented by the desire to recoup his losses as quickly as possible. In the morning he decided upon a subtle scheme.

For a long time he hovered affectionately at his father's side, poking his head up under his father's

elbow and planting kisses on his red porous neck, which had a fresh, soapy smell. Father stroked the little scholar's stubbly head and pressed it to the jacket with the disgusting buttons.

"What is it, Petya, what is it, my little man?"

That was just the question Petya had been waiting for, that and the gentle tremor in his father's voice, telling him that now he could get whatever he wanted.

"Daddy," he said, squirming and adjusting his belt with feigned shyness, "Daddy, I want five kopeks."

"What for?" Even in his gentlest moods Father never lost sight of his strict principles of upbringing.

"I need it badly."

"You must tell my why."

"I need it, that's all."

"But tell me why. I must know how you plan to spend that sum of money. If it's for something useful and necessary I shall be glad to give it to you, but if it's for something bad I shan't. So tell me now. What do you need the money for?"

How could Petya tell Father that he needed the money to gamble with? That was quite out of the question.

So he pulled the frank expression of a well-mannered boy who wants something for his sweet tooth.

"I'll buy some chocolate," he mumbled.

"Chocolate? Splendid! I could hardly object to that."

Petya beamed.

Father rose and without a word walked over to the desk. He opened it and handed the stunned boy a bar of chocolate with a picture on the wrapper. The wrapper was sealed like an envelope, with five blobs of sealing wax printed on it.

Petya took the chocolate, tears in his eyes.

"Thank you, Daddy dear," he mumbled.

He set off for the Gymnasium with a broken heart.

Still, it was better than nothing. Perhaps he would be able to swap the chocolate for some lugs.

That day, however, Petya had no opportunity to play lugs.

Hardly had he passed Kulikovo Field and entered Novorybnaya Street, in which the Gymnasium stood, when he noticed that some very special, important, and extremely joyous event was taking place in the city.

Despite the early hour the streets were full of people. All of them looked very excited and alert, although none seemed to be in a hurry to get anywhere. Most of the people were standing in groups near the gateways of houses or had gathered round the book-stalls on the street corners. On all sides Petya saw people unfolding newspapers which turned an even greyer grey in the fine drizzle.

The national flag of white, blue, and red had been hung out on all the houses. By looking at the flags Petya could guess how rich the householders were. Some flags were small and faded, with short staffs carelessly attached to the gateways. Others were huge and brand-new, and had an edging of tricoloured cord

with elaborate tricoloured tassels reaching all the way to the pavement.

The wind had a hard time of it to stir those heavy flags, which gave off a distinct odour of dye.

The Gymnasium was closed. Happy-faced schoolboys were running down the street in Petya's direction. The Gymnasium porter, in a white apron over his winter coat with a sheepskin collar, was stringing a thin wire among the trees in front of the building. That meant there would be illuminations in the evening! There were always illuminations on holidays, for instance, on the namedays of His Majesty the Emperor and the members of the royal family.

In Petya's imagination the three magic words "illuminations", "holiday" and "nameday" were like the three facets of a glass lustre from a church chandelier. Such pendants had a high value among the boys of Odessa. When you put the small prism to your eye, the whole world became bright with the patriotic rainbow of the " Tsar’s day .

But was this a "Tsar's day"? No, it wasn't. One always knew when they were coming by the calendar, and the number on Father's calendar today was black, which meant neither illuminations nor a holiday nor a royal nameday.

In that case, what was it all about? Could another heir have been born to the Tsar, like last year? No, that was impossible. He couldn't have a boy every year, could he? So it must be something else. But what?

"I say there, what's today?" Petya asked the porter.

"Freedom," the porter replied in what to Petya seemed a jesting tone.

"No, really."

"Just what I said—freedom."

"Freedom?"

"Freedom to go home today because there won't be any lessons. They're cancelled."

Petya's feelings were hurt.

"Listen here, porter, I want a straight answer," he said sternly, doing his best to uphold the dignity of a pupil of the Odessa Fifth Gymnasium.

"That's just what I gave you. And now go home to your loving parents and stop bothering a man who has work to do."

With a scornful shrug of his shoulders Petya nonchalantly sauntered away from this porter who had developed the disgusting habit of addressing pupils in the tone of a pedagogue.

The policeman to whom, as a representative of the government, Petya decided to address his question, looked the swarthy little boy up and down and slowly stroked his long red moustaches.

Then all of a sudden he screwed up his face in a typically Jewish expression and said with an accent, "Frid'm!"

Thoroughly crushed, Petya slowly made his way home.

More and more people were coming out into the streets. Here and there Petya saw student caps, the astrakhan muffs of college girls and the broad-brimmed

hats of free-thinkers. Several times again he heard the rather hazy word "freedom".

At the corner of Kanatnaya Street his attention was attracted by a knot of people gathered round a sheet of paper pasted on the wooden fence of the firewood yard.

He made his way forward, and this is what he read:

SUPREME MANIFESTO

We, Nikolai the Second,
by the Grace of God Emperor
and Autocrat of All the Russias,
Tsar of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland,
and so on and so forth.

Riots and disturbances in the capital cities and in many other places of Our Empire have filled Our heart with great and heavy grief. The weal of the Russian Sovereign is indivisible from the weal of the people; the people's grief is His grief. The disturbances that have now broken out may lead to a profound dislocation of the nation and may threaten the integrity and unity of Our State.

The great oath of Royal service enjoins Us to strive, with all the powers of Our reason and authority, for the earliest termination of the disturbances so dangerous to the State. . . .

Petya managed to get that far, but not without some difficulty; he stumbled over such strange and hazy words as "weal", "dislocation", "enjoins" and "earliest termination", and also the large number of capital letters; contrary to all rules of spelling, they stuck up in the most unexpected places, like charred stumps after a forest fire.

The only thing he could make out of it all was that the Tsar was evidently in trouble and was asking everyone to help him in any way he could.

To tell the truth, deep down in his heart Petya felt a bit sorry for the poor Tsar, especially when he remembered that someone had beaten him over the head with a bamboo cane.

But why everybody should be rejoicing and hanging out flags was a mystery. Could something more cheerful be written farther on? However, he did not have the perseverance to read the Tsar's sad sheet to the end.

Petya did notice, however, that almost every person who came up to the announcement looked first of all for a place in the middle which for some reason gave him special pleasure. It was a place he was sure to read aloud, and then, turning to the others, he would exclaim triumphantly: "Aha! It's actually down in black and white: 'To grant inviolability of person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly, and association.' "

After this some of the people, paying no attention to the fact that they were in the street, would shout "Hurrah!" and kiss those around them, just like at Easter.

Here it was that the boy witnessed a scene which stirred him to the depths of his heart.

A droshky drove up to the crowd, a gentleman in a bowler that was brand-new but already crushed jumped lightly from it to the ground, put a pair of crooked pince-nez to his nose, quickly read the wonderful place, then kissed the astounded driver three times on his copper-red beard, flung himself into the droshky, and, shouting at the top of his voice, "Half a ruble for vodka! Drive like hell, you dog!" disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared.

In short, it was an extraordinary day in every respect.

The sky had cleared. The drizzle stopped. A mother-of-pearl sun broke through.

In the yard, Nusya Kogan was striding up and down importantly in his black school jacket that had hooks instead of buttons and in a cap without a badge. He was dreaming for how he would now be able to enter the Gymnasium, since there was to be religious freedom, and of the handsome badge he would wear on his cap.

Petya played hopscotch with him for a long time, pausing after each hop to describe the horrors of life at the Gymnasium in an attempt to frighten Nusya.

"Then he calls your name and starts questioning you, and you don't know a thing. And then he says to you, 'Go to your seat. Sit down!' And then he puts a nought opposite your name. That's what it's like!"

"But what if I prepare my lessons well?" the sensible Nusya replied with a confident grin, shrugging his shoulders.

"Makes no difference," Petya insisted, hopping on one leg and pushing the stone out of the "Heaven" square with his toe. "Makes no difference! He'll slap down a nought!"

Then Petya treated Nusya to a piece of chocolate, and Nusya ran into the shop and brought out "a handful like that" of raisins.

Then Petya was called in to lunch. He invited Nusya to come along with him. Father was already at home.

"Ah!" he exclaimed gaily at sight of Nusya. "So we shall soon have the pleasure of seeing you a Gymnasium pupil, young) man! Congratulations, congratulations!"

Nusya made a polite, dignified bow.

"Why not?" he said, dropping his eyes in shy pride and blushing a deep pink with pleasure.

Auntie Tatyana beamed. Father beamed. Pavlik made loud noises in the passage as he played "freedom". For a reason he alone knew he covered the overturned chairs, placed in a row, with a rug and crawled under it, mercilessly tooting on his horn, without which, to everyone's annoyance, not a single game was played.

But today no one stopped the lad, and he played away to his heart's content.

Dunya kept running in from the yard to report the latest news in town. That at the railway station there was a crowd carrying a red flag, a crowd so thick "you couldn't squeeze through it". That in Richelieu Street the crowd had cheered a soldier and had tossed him up in the air. "The poor thing flew up and down, up and down!" That people were running from all sides to the police station where, it was said, the prisoners were being released. "A woman was running with a little girl in her arms, and she was crying for all she was worth!" That there was a guard of military cadets at the Army Staff building, and they weren't letting anyone through to see the soldiers, and were driving people away from the windows. But one daring fellow did manage to get

up to a window. He stood on a rock and shouted, "Long live freedom!" And the soldiers replied through the windows, "Long live freedom!"

All this news was accepted joyfully, with eager questions :

"What about the police?"

"What did he do?"

"What did she do?"

"What did they do?"

"What's happening in Greek Street?"

Every once in a while they opened the balcony door and stepped out, in spite of the cold, to see what was going on in the street. At the end of Kulikovo Field they could make out a dark mass of people and a red flag.

That evening visitors dropped in, which was something that had not happened for a long time. They were teachers who taught in the same school as Father and college girls who were acquaintances of Auntie Tatyana. The hall-stand was covered with black overcoats, capes, broad-brimmed hats and little astrakhan caps.

Petya sat in the kitchen watching the boiled sausage, the choice ham, and the bread being sliced.

As he dropped to sleep after that tiring but happy day he could hear, from the dining-room, the rumble and laughter of strange voices and the tinkle of spoons.

Together with the bright ray of light, blue cigarette smoke came into the nursery from the dining-room. It added to the fresh, warm air something unusually

manly and free, something they did not have in the house, for Father did not smoke.

Outside the window it was much lighter than usual; jelly-like streaks of light from the different-coloured lanterns were mingled with the weak glow from the street lamps.

Petya knew that now, instead of the flags, six-sided lanterns with panes that were red-hot and smoky from the candles burning inside had been strung on wires between the trees, all over the city.

Double lines of the same kind of lights stretched all the way down the long, straight Odessa streets. They beckoned one farther and farther into the mysterious distance of the transformed city, from street to street, as though promising that somewhere, perhaps very near, just round the corner, there was a wonderful, colourful spectacle of remarkable beauty and brilliance.

But round the corner there would be the same long street and the same rows of lanterns—monotonous, even though they were of different colours, and just as tired of burning as man was tired of walking between them.

Red, green, violet, yellow, and blue bars of lights, bending in the fog, fell on the passers-by, slid across the house fronts, and gave their false promises of something new and much more beautiful round the corner.

All this wearisome variety had always been called "royal nameday", "holiday", or "Tsar's day", but today

it was called by a new word, which also had a sound of many different colours—"constitution".

The word "constitution" kept coming from the dining-room amidst the rumble—of strange, deep voices and the silvery tinkle of tea spoons.

Petya fell asleep to the noise of the gathering, which lasted until an unusually late hour, probably until nearly midnight.

34

IN THE BASEMENT

As soon as the rumour reached Near Mills that prisoners were being released, Gavrik set off for the police station.

Terenti, who had not slept at home for the past week and had appeared from some unknown place early that morning, walked to the corner with Gavrik. He was gloomy, and so tired that he could scarcely keep on his feet.

"Go and meet the old man, of course, Gavrik. Only for the love of God don't bring him here. Because with all this 'freedom', may it be thrice damned, there's probably plenty of snoopers about. One of them will hang on your tail and then that'll be the end of our meeting place, and a lot of people will get into trouble. Clear?"

Gavrik nodded. "Uh-huh."

Since he had come to live in Near Mills, Gavrik had learned to understand a great deal and had found out many things. It was no longer a secret to him that the strike committee was meeting at Terenti's house.

Many was the time he had had to sit on the bench beside the gate almost till dawn, whistling softly whenever strangers came near the house.

Several times he had seen the sailor, who appeared out of nowhere at dawn and then quickly disappeared. Now he was hardly recognisable. He wore a good overcoat and an engineer's cap with the crossed hammers badge. But the main thing was his foppish little moustache and beard. They changed him so much that the boy couldn't believe he was the same man he and Grandpa had pulled out of the sea.

However, one look into those humorous brown eyes, at that fleeting smile, and at the anchor on his hand caused all doubts to vanish.

In keeping with the unwritten but firm law of Near Mills never to be surprised at anything, never to recognise anyone, and to hold one's tongue, whenever Gavrik met the sailor he pretended he had never seen him before. The sailor behaved the same way towards Gavrik.

Only once, when leaving, did he nod to the boy as to an old acquaintance, giving him a wink and clapping him on the back as he would a grown-up.

"Weep no more, Marusya," he sang out, "you will yet be mine!"

Then, bending his head in the low doorway, he stepped out into the darkness.

Gavrik sensed that of all the people who came to see Terenti—from the Ghen factory, from the Weinstein flour-mill, from the docks, from the Brodsky factory, and a great many other places—the sailor was the one the authorities most feared and were most anxious to track down.

He undoubtedly belonged to that glorious and mysterious "fighting group" about which there was so much talk of late not only in Near Mills but everywhere in town.

"Uh-huh," said Gavrik. "Only it's damned cold, and if I don't bring the old man to Near Mills where else can I take him?"

Terenti thought for a moment. "Listen," he said finally. "First take him down to the beach, to the hut. If anybody shadows you he won't learn a thing. Wait in the hut till it's dark, and then carefully go straight to this address—only memorise it: it's 15 Malaya Arnautskaya. Find the janitor and ask him for Joseph Karlovich. When you see Joseph Karlovich you say—now remember this— 'How do you do, Joseph Karlovich? Sophia Petrovna sent me to ask if you've received any letters from Nikolayev.' Then he'll say, 'No, I haven't had a letter for two months.' Clear?"

"Uh-huh."

"Can you repeat it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Let's hear it."

Gavrik puckered his forehead and wrinkled his nose. "Well, it's 15 Malaya Arnautskaya," he said, concentrating as though he were answering at an exam. "I ask the janitor for Joseph Karlovich, and then I say, 'How do you do, Joseph Karlovich? Sophia Petrovna sent me to ask you if a letter came from Nikolayev.' And then he says, 'I haven't had a letter for two months.' "

"Right. After that you needn't be afraid to tell him Terenti sent you. Tell biny-to let the old man live at his place for a while, and to feed him. Later we'll see. I'll drop in. Clear?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, good-bye."

Terenti returned home, while Gavrik hurried off to the jail.

He ran for all he was worth, squeezing his way through the crowd which became thicker and thicker as he approached the railway station.

At Sennaya Square he began to meet men who had been released from the jail. Some were on foot and others rode in droshkies surrounded by bundles and baskets as though coming from the railway station; they were accompanied by relatives and friends, and they waved their hats in the air.

Crowds ran down the street beside the droshkies, chanting, "Long live freedom! Long live freedom!"

Near the Alexandrovsky jail, which was surrounded by reinforced details of mounted and foot police, there was such a huge, dense crowd that even Gavrik

despaired of making his way through it. In that crowd he might very easily miss Grandpa.

The mere thought that if this happened Grandpa might bring some snooper along with him to Near Mills sent the boy into a cold sweat.

His heart pounding, he dashed down an alley to bypass the crowd. He simply *had* to reach the jail and find Grandpa. Suddenly he saw him two paces away.

But good heavens, could that be Grandpa? Gavrik did not recognise him at first.

Coming towards him was a decrepit old man with a beard of silvery bristles, with watery blue eyes, and a sunken, toothless mouth. He was keeping as close as he could to the walls of the houses. His legs were bent, and they swayed as though they were made of cotton wool. He was shuffling along with difficulty in his broken boots, stopping to rest at every third step. But for the basket that dangled from the old man's trembling hand Gavrik never would have recognised him.

The familiar wicker basket with the grimy canvas cover immediately caught the boy's eye. It made his heart contract with pain.

"Grandpa!" he shouted in a frightened voice. "Grandpa, is that you?"

The old man did not even give a start. Slowly he stopped and turned towards Gavrik a face that expressed neither joy nor excitement, nothing but submissive resignation. He chewed his lips indifferently. His watery eyes stared at some point in

the distance, and they were so motionless that one might have thought he did not see his grandson.

"Grandpa, where are you going?" Gavrik asked, raising his voice as though the old man were deaf.

The old man chewed his lips for a long time before he replied.

"To Near Mills," he announced in a quiet, normal voice.

"You can't," Gavrik whispered, glancing over his shoulder. "Terenti said for heaven's sake not to go to Near Mills."

The old man also glanced over his shoulder, but in a sort of slow, indifferent, mechanical way.

"Come, Grandpa, let's go home and then we'll see."

Grandpa obediently turned round, and without saying a word started to shuffle in the opposite direction, putting one foot before the other with an effort.

Gavrik gave Grandpa his shoulder, and the old man leaned heavily on it. Slowly they made their way across the restless city towards the sea, like a blind man with his guide—the boy in front and the old man behind him.

The old man stopped frequently to rest. It took them two hours to reach the shore from the police station. Alone, Gavrik usually covered that distance in fifteen minutes.

The padlock, broken and rusty, lay in the brown weeds near the hut. The door hung crookedly on the upper hinge, swaying and creaking in the wind. The

autumn rains had taken the last traces of Grandma's whitewash from the blackened boards. The entire roof was covered with burdock stalks: this was obviously the work of bird-catchers, who had turned the vacant hut into a trap.

Inside, everything was topsy-turvy. The tattered quilt and the pillow, damp and smeared with clay, lay in a corner. The little trunk, however, had net been touched and stood in its usual place. Unhurriedly the old man entered his home. He sat down on the edge of the bed, put the basket on his knees, and stared impassively at the corner of the wall, paying no attention whatsoever to the disorder.

It was as though he had merely dropped in to take a rest, to sit for a minute or two and catch his breath, and then slowly to set out again.

A strong cold wind laden with sea spray blew in through the broken window. A storm was raging along the deserted coast. The wind carried white tufts—seagulls and bits of foam—over the echoing cliffs. The thunder of the waves resounded in the caves along the shore.

"Why don't you lie down, Grandpa?"

Grandpa obediently lay down. Gavrik put a pillow under his head and covered him with the quilt. The old man pulled up his legs. He was shivering.

"Never mind, Grandpa. As soon as it's dark we'll go somewhere else. Take a rest meanwhile."

Grandpa did not answer. His entire appearance expressed complete indifference and resignation.

Suddenly he looked at Gavrik with swollen, watery eyes that seemed turned wrong side out and said, after chewing his sunken lips for a long time, "The boat. Is it safe?"

Gavrik hastened to assure him that the boat was in a safe place, at a neighbour's. The old man nodded in approval and again fell silent.

After an hour he turned over on his other side with a grunt. Then he gave a moan.

"Does something hurt, Grandpa?"

"They beat me," the old man said with an apologetic smile, showing his pink, toothless gums. "They knocked the guts clean out of me."

Gavrik hid his face.

The old man did not say another word until evening. As soon as it grew dark the boy said, "Come, Grandpa."

The old man rose, picked up his basket, and they set off, past the shuttered villas, past the closed shooting gallery and restaurant, to 15 Malaya Arnautskaya Street.

After asking the janitor Gavrik had no difficulty in finding Joseph Karlovich's room in the dark basement. He knocked on a door padded with torn felt.

"Who's there?" came a voice that sounded familiar.

"Does Joseph Karlovich live here?"

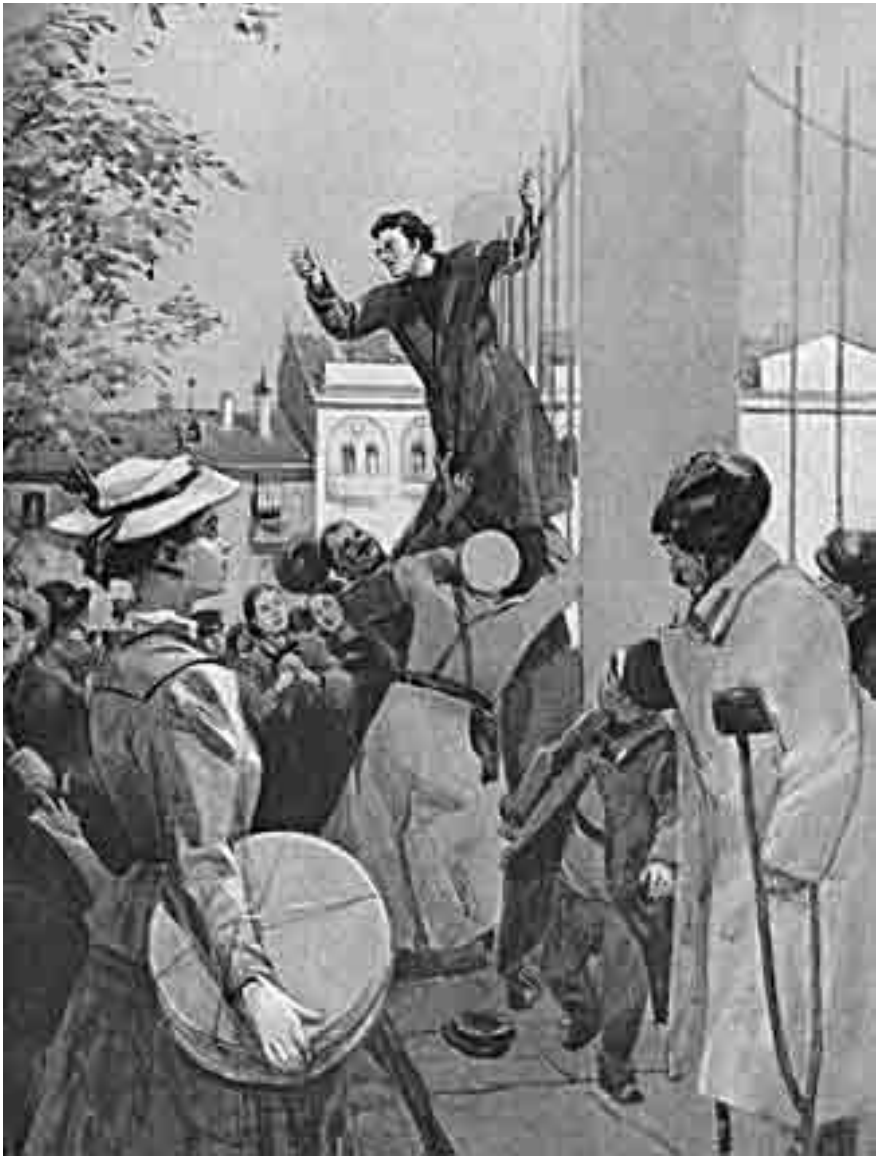
"What do you want?"

"Open the door, please. Sophia Petrovna sent me."

The door was opened at once, and to his complete astonishment Gavrik saw on the threshold the owner of

the shooting gallery, holding a paraffin lamp. He looked calmly and somewhat haughtily at the boy.

"I am Joseph Karlovich. What do you want?" he said, without moving from the spot.



"How do you do, Joseph Karlovich?" Gavrik said painstakingly, as though reciting a well-learned lesson. "Sophia Petrovna sent me to ask you if a letter came from Nikolayev."

The owner of the shooting gallery surveyed the boy from head to foot in amazement. This took him all of two minutes, even though Gavrik was only a little chap.

"There hasn't been a letter for two months," he said finally, in a haughtier tone than before.

He paused, then shook his head regretfully and added, "As unpunctual a lady as ever lived. Isn't it a shame?"

And in a flash his face assumed the gracious expression of a Polish count welcoming a Papal nuncio to his estate. It was an expression that did not fit in at all with his bare feet and the absence of a shirt under his jacket.

"I beg you humbly to enter, young man. If I recall correctly, you have visited my establishment on occasion. What a pleasant coincidence! And this old man, I believe, is your grandfather, isn't he? Please come in."

Grandfather and grandson entered a cubbyhole whose poverty amazed even them.

Never had Gavrik imagined that this most powerful and richest of men, who owned a shooting gallery and — just think of it!—four Monte Cristos, lived in such a place.

He stared in wonder at the bare walls, covered with green mould. He expected to see them hung with rifles and pistols, but he saw only one nail from which dangled a pair of incredibly shabby braces that looked more like reins than anything else.

"But where are your rifles?" he exclaimed, almost with horror.

Joseph Karlovich pretended he had not heard the question. With a sweeping gesture he invited them to be seated.

"Is there something you wish to tell me?" he asked in a low voice from the corner.

Gavrik said that his brother wanted him to take Grandpa in for a while.

"Tell your brother that I shall do everything necessary and that he needn't have any misgivings," Joseph Karlovich said rapidly. "I have some connections in town. I believe that sooner or later I shall succeed in finding him a place as night watchman."

Gavrik left Grandpa with Joseph Karlovich, promising to look in from time to time, and went out.

"Tell Terenti," the owner of the shooting gallery whispered at the door, "that Sophia Petrovna wants him to know that she has quite a supply of nuts, only she regrets they aren't very big ones. Not walnuts. He will understand. They aren't walnuts. Have him arrange the transportation. Is that clear?"

"Yes," said Gavrik, who was accustomed to receiving such messages. "They're not walnuts, and have him send someone for them." "That's right."

Joseph Karlovich rummaged about in the lining of his frightful jacket and produced a ten-kopek piece.

"Please take this and buy yourself some sweets. I regret that I cannot offer you anything else. I should, upon my honour, be glad to present you with a Monte Cristo, but—" Joseph Karlovich sadly spread his hands, and his passion-ravaged face gave a twitch —"but unfortunately, owing to my regrettable character, I haven't a single one left."

Gavrik solemnly accepted the ten-kopek piece, thanked him, and went out into the street, which was lit up by the fitful glow of the illuminations.

35

A DEBT OF HONOUR

In the morning Petya took two pairs of leather sandals from the storeroom and on the way to school sold them to an old-clothes man for four kopeks.

When Gavrik appeared in the afternoon the boys immediately spread out their lugs. Petya lost everything he had just bought even more quickly than the first time.

It was easy to see why. The friends were too unevenly matched.

In Gavrik's pouches lay almost all the lugs of the seaside district. He could afford big risks, while Petya had to treasure each deuce and place miserly bets, which, as everyone knows, always leads to quick losses.

The next day Petya, no longer able to control himself, stealthily took sixteen kopeks from the sideboard, change put there by Dunya.

This time he decided to play more wisely and cautiously. The first thing he needed in order to win was a good king-lug. "

Petya's king-lug was a big and remarkably handsome livery button with lions and a count's crown on it, but in spite of its beauty it was worthless: it was too light. What he had to do was make it heavier. He went to the railway station, made his way over to the sidings, and on a dead end siding beyond the engine-shed he stripped a lead seal from a goods van, nearly dying from fright as he did so.

At home he beat the lead into the bowl of his king-lug with a hammer. Then he went across Kulikovo Field and put the lug on a rail. When he picked it up after a suburban train had passed over it, the lug was hot and heavy and wonderfully flattened out. Now it was as good as any of Gavrik's king-lugs.

Gavrik came soon after, and they began to play. It was a long and bitter contest.

A good king-lug was not enough, it appeared. Skill was the thing! Petya ended up by losing everything he had and falling into debt besides.

Gavrik said he would come for the debt tomorrow.

The period that now set in for Petya was like a nightmare.

In the evening, after dinner, Father said calmly, "There was sixteen kopeks' change on the sideboard. You didn't by any chance take it, did you?"

The blood rushed into Petya's heart and then out of it.

"No," he said with all the indifference he could muster.

"Come now, look me in the eye."

Father took Petya by the chin and turned up his face.

"On my word of honour," said Petya, trying his hardest to look Father straight in the eye. "By the true and holy Cross."

Turning cold with horror, Petya faced the icon and crossed himself.

He expected a bolt of lightning to come through the ceiling and fell him the very next instant.

Surely God would not fail to punish him at once for such out-and-out sacrilege. But nothing happened.

"Very strange," Father remarked coolly. "That means a member of our household has taken to thieving. Your Aunt and I obviously have no need to take money in secret from the sideboard. Pavlik has been in sight of grown-ups all day long, so he couldn't have taken it either. You've given your word of honour. Therefore, we can only assume that the money was

taken by Dunya, who has served us faithfully for five years."

At the moment Dunya happened to be in the anteroom, filling a lamp.

She set the lamp-chimney and her rag on the mirror-stand and appeared in the doorway. Her neck and even her arms, which were bared to the elbow, had turned red. Her big good-natured face had broken out in splotches and was screwed up in misery.

"May I never see a happy day for the rest of my life," she cried, "if the young master didn't lose that change from the market playing lugs with Gavrik!" Father looked at Petya.

The boy realised that he had to make a lightning retort, that without losing a second he had to say something proud and noble and just, something which would crush Dunya and instantly free him from all suspicion.

A minute ago he still could have confessed. But now that the matter of lugs had been brought up—not for anything in the world!

"You have no right to talk like that!" he screamed hoarsely. A bright flush of false indignation suffused his face. "You're lying!"

But even that did not seem enough to him. "You—you're probably—the thief yourself!" he blurted out, stamping his feet.

While Dunya bustled about in the kitchen packing her things and demanding that she be paid off, Petya ran into the nursery and slammed the door so furiously

that the enamelled image of the guardian angel on the back of the bed began to rock.

He flatly refused to ask Dunya's forgiveness. He got into bed and made believe he had fainted. They left him in peace.

Father did not come in to kiss him good-night.

Petya heard Auntie Tatyana pleading with Dunya to remain. Dunya, sobbing, finally consented.

Many times that night he sprang awake, horrified at what he had done. He was ready to run to the kitchen and kiss Dunya's feet to beg forgiveness. But what upset him still more was the thought of Gavrik, who would demand settlement tomorrow.

In the morning Petya waited until Father led Pavlik to the bathroom to wash. Then he went to the wardrobe and took out the old uniform dress coat.

Family legend had it that Daddy had had the dress coat made when he was graduating from the university and that he had worn it only once in his life, at the insistence of Mummy's strait-laced relatives who demanded when Daddy married Mummy that everything should be done the proper way. Ever since then it had hung in the wardrobe, forgotten by everybody.

The dress coat had a great many lugs but the pity of it was that most of them were too small to be of any use in the game.

There were only four big ones. But even these fell short of expectations: they were cheap, thick white threes which had practically gone out of circulation.

The Odessa tailor who sewed on those buttons sometime in the last century had done a conscientious job: they did not yield to scissors. Petya impatiently ripped them off, cloth and all, with his teeth.

Need we say it? This time, too, Petya had miserable luck.

He fell deeper in debt to Gavrik than ever.

He was now hopelessly involved. Gavrik regarded him with a dour sort of pity that boded no good.

"Well, Petya, what do you say?" he asked sternly.

There was no misunderstanding those words. They meant roughly this: "Now look here, pal, if you don't pay back those lugs I'll have to take it out of your hide.

Friendship's got nothing to do with it. That's the law, and you know it yourself. Lugs aren't cigarette pictures — they cost money. So don't be sore."

Petya wasn't sore. He knew that Gavrik was in the right. He merely heaved a deep sigh and asked for a little more time. Gavrik consented.

All that evening Petya was in torment. His ears became so hot from the mental strain that they had a distinct ruby glow in the light of the lamp.

He thought up a thousand and one ways of getting rich quick, but they were all either too fantastic or too criminal. Finally a wonderful yet surprisingly simple idea came to him. Hadn't his late Grandfather, Mummy's Daddy, been a major? How could that ever have slipped his mind!

Losing no time, he tore a sheet from his arithmetic copybook and sat down to write a letter to his

Grandmother, Mummy's Mummy, who lived in Ekaterinoslav.

He showered her with endearments, reported brilliant progress at the Gymnasium (to tell the truth, a bit of an exaggeration) and then asked her to send him —as quickly as possible—dear Grandfather's major's uniform as a remembrance.

A shrewd boy, Petya. He knew just the right approach to that kindhearted old lady who treasured the memory of Grandfather, a hero of the Turkish war, no less ardently than she loved Petya, her eldest grandson.

Further he told her that he had made up his mind to follow in his heroic Grandfather's footsteps and become a hero too. He had decided upon an army career and needed the uniform as a constant spur to his martial spirit.

Petya hoped to get a pile of lugs from the major's uniform—about twenty, if not all of thirty, excellent officers' fives with embossed eagles.

That alone could clear his debt and perhaps even give him a chance to win back his losses.

The parcel, he calculated, was sure to reach him in a week at the latest.

Petya told Gavrik the whole story. Gavrik said it was a good idea. Together, standing on tiptoe, the boys dropped the letter into the big yellow box with the picture of a registered letter with five seals on it and two crossed postal bugles.

Now all they had to do was sit back and wait.

In anticipation of rich pickings Gavrik let Petya draw upon unlimited credit, and Petya light-mindedly gambled away the future legacy from his Grandfather.

36

THE HEAVY SATCHEL

A week passed, then another, and still no parcel from Grandmother.

Although the Tsar had proclaimed "freedom" there were more and more disturbances. The postal service worked badly. Father stopped receiving the *Russkiye Vedomosti* from Moscow, and in the evenings he sat silent and disturbed, not knowing what was going on in the world or what view to take of things.

The preparatory class was dismissed for an indefinite period. Petya idled away his days. During this time he lost so much to Gavrik on credit that chills ran down his spine whenever he thought about it.

One day Gavrik came and said with an ominous smile, "You'd better not expect those lugs of yours so soon. There's going to be a general in a couple of days."

A month earlier Petya would not have understood this. But now it was perfectly clear: a "general" meant a strike.

There was no reason to doubt Gavrik's words. Petya had noted long ago that somehow or other

everything was known much earlier in Near Mills than in town.

The news was a knife-thrust in the heart.

"But couldn't it come before that?"

"Not likely."

Petya turned pale.

"What about that debt?" Gavrik said firmly.

Petya trembled with impatience to start playing. He hastily gave his word of honour and swore by the true and holy Cross that tomorrow, in one way or another, he would pay it all back without fail.

"See that you do! Or else—" Gavrik planted his legs in their broad lilac-coloured corduroys wide apart, sailor fashion.

That evening Petya stole Pavlik's famous moneybox, locked himself in the bathroom, and with a table-knife pried out its contents: forty-three kopeks in coppers and silver.

He performed this complicated operation with amazing skill and speed and then filled the box with a collection of rattling trash: nails, lead seals, bone buttons and pieces of iron.

This was absolutely necessary, for twice a day—morning and evening—thrifty, methodical Pavlik checked his moneybox: he raised the tin to his ear and, sticking out his tongue, rattled the kopeks, delighting in the sound and the weight of his treasure. One can imagine the howl he would raise if he discovered the theft. But everything went off well.

Before going to sleep Pavlik rattled his bank full of trash and found it in perfect order.

But crime, as we all know, never pays. In three days Petya lost Pavlik's money to the last kopek.

There was no hope of Grandfather's uniform coming soon. Again Gavrik began to press for payment.

Every morning Petya sat on the windowsill waiting for Gavrik.

He pictured with horror the day it all came to light: the lugs, the sandals, the dress coat, Pavlik's moneybox. Inevitably, sooner or later, that day would arrive. Horrors!

But he tried not to think about that. He tormented himself with the eternal fruitless dream of the bankrupt gambler—the dream of recouping his losses.

Walking the streets was dangerous, yet Gavrik never failed to appear. He would come to the middle of the yard, put two fingers in his mouth, and let out a magnificent whistle. Petya would hastily nod to his chum from the window and run down the back stairs. "The lugs come?"

"Tomorrow, I swear it, on my word of honour. By the true and holy Cross. This is the last time."

One fine day Gavrik announced that he couldn't wait any longer. In other words, Petya, as a bankrupt debtor, now became Gavrik's slave until he paid back in full.

Such was the harsh but just law of the street.

Gavrik tapped Petya on the shoulder, like a knight-errant initiating his servitor into squiredom.

"Now you'll be my shadow," he said good-naturedly. "Fetch your satchel," he added in a stern voice.

"My satchel? What for?"

"For the lugs, you bloke."

A shrewd gleam flickered in Gavrik's eyes.

To tell the truth, Petya was delighted at the prospect of such a merry form of slavery. He had long wanted to roam about town with Gavrik but because of what was going on he had been forbidden, in the strictest of terms, to set foot outside the yard. Now his conscience could rest perfectly at ease: he had nothing to do with it—it was Gavrik's will, and he had to obey Gavrik without a word. He didn't want to walk about town, of course, but he simply had to: that was the law.

Petya ran upstairs and came down with his satchel.

"Put it on."

Petya obeyed. From all sides Gavrik inspected the little Gymnasium scholar in the long overcoat reaching to his heels and with the empty satchel on his back. What he saw evidently satisfied him.

"Gymnasium card?"

"Yes."

"Show it here."

Petya produced his card. Gavrik opened it and spelled out the words at the top: "Valuing his honour, the Gymnasium pupil cannot fail to value the honour of his school. . . ."

"Right," he remarked, returning the card. "Stow it away. Might come in handy."

Then Gavrik turned Petya round and filled the satchel with heavy bags of lugs.

"Now nobody'll stop us from going anywhere," Gavrik said, fastening the straps of the satchel. He patted the calf-skin cover with satisfaction.

Petya did not quite get the meaning of those words but following the general law of the street—to ask less and to know more—he held his tongue. The boys cautiously left the yard.

Thus began their wanderings together through the disordered city.

With each passing day it became more dangerous to walk the streets. Gavrik, however, did not give up his thrilling and mysterious life of a roaming champion. On the contrary, the more restless and frightening the city became the more stubbornly did he make his way to the remotest and most dangerous places. So much so that at times Petya began to wonder whether there wasn't some inexplicable connection between Gavrik and the disorders.

From morning to evening the two went in and out of backyards where Gavrik carried on a business in lugs — buying, selling and exchanging—with the local boys. In some of the yards he collected debts. In others he played. In still others he had strange dealings with grown-ups who, to Petya's extreme astonishment, were just as keen about lugs as children were.

Petya, carrying the heavy satchel on his back, obediently followed Gavrik everywhere. And again, in Gavrik's presence the city magically turned itself about

before Petya's wonder-struck eyes, showing him its communicating courtyards, cellars, holes in fences, sheds, firewood yards, glassed-in arcades, and all its other secrets. Petya saw the horrifying and at the same time picturesque poverty of the Odessa slums; until then he had never even known they existed.

Hiding in gateways when there was shooting and passing around overturned horse-trams blocking the roadway, the boys roamed up and down the city, going to the most outlying sections.

Thanks to Petya's Gymnasium uniform they easily entered districts that were cordoned by troops and the police. Gavrik taught Petya to go up to the chief of the cordon detail and say in a tearful voice, "Mr. Officer, please let me and my pal cross over to the other side. We live in that big grey house over there and I'm sure Mummy's worried why we've been away so long."

The boy looked so guileless and respectable in his Gymnasium overcoat and with the calf-skin satchel on his back that the officer, although he was not supposed to let anyone pass into the suspected zone, usually made an exception in the case of the two frightened kids.

"Run for it, only be careful. Keep close to the wall, and don't let me see you again. Now be off."

In this way the boys could always reach districts that were completely cut off to others.

They went several times to an old Greek house in Malaya Arnautskaya. In the courtyard there was a fountain—a pyramid of spongy sea rocks with a green

iron stork on top. Once upon a time water used to come out of its beak.

While Petya waited in the yard Gavrik ran down into the basement, returning with a lot of bags of unusually heavy lugs. He stuffed them into Petya's satchel and then they quickly ran out of the quiet yard with its old, rickety galleries.

Once Petya saw Gavrik's grandfather there. He was walking slowly on bent legs across the yard to the refuse-bin.

"Oh, Grandpa!" he cried. "I say there, what are you doing here? I thought you were in jail."

Grandpa looked at the boy but obviously did not recognise him.

"I'm here now," he mumbled tonelessly, shifting his pail to his other hand. "I'm—a watchman—a night watchman now—"

He continued slowly on his way.

The boys went to the port, to Chumka, to Duke's Gardens, to Peresyp, to the Ghen factory—everywhere but Near Mills. To Near Mills Gavrik went alone, after his day of labours.

Had Auntie Tatyana and Father had even an inkling of the places their Petya visited during that time they surely would have lost their reason.

37

THE BOMB

Finally, however, this wonderful but weird life of wandering came to an end.

On that memorable day Gavrik appeared earlier than usual, and he and Petya immediately set out.

Gavrik's face was grey and extraordinarily grim. His tightly-pressed lips had turned different colours from the cold. He walked along with a quick, rolling gait, his hands deep in the pockets of his broad corduroys—a small, hunched, determined figure. Every now and then a hard light came into his clear, fixed eyes so like Grandpa's. Petya barely managed to keep up with his friend. They practically ran through the streets, which were deserted like the streets in a dream.

Tense expectation hung in the grey air. The boys' footsteps rang on the paving stones. Occasionally the pane of ice covering an empty puddle broke underfoot.

All of a sudden a faint rumble sounded somewhere far away, in the centre of town. It was as if a pyramid of empty crates had crashed to the roadway from a waggon.

Gavrik stopped and listened to the feeble echo.

"What's that?" Petya whispered. "Crates?"

"A bomb," Gavrik said dryly and with assurance. "Somebody's been done in."

Two streets farther on a woman with a basket from which lumps of charcoal and quinces were dropping turned the corner at a run.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Holy Mother!" she said over and over again, trying to straighten her kerchief with a trembling hand. "Oh, Lord, it was awful! The man was torn to pieces."

"Where?"

"In Police Street. There I was, walking along, and here he was, in a carriage. And then it exploded. Tore him to bits. Lord forgive us! It killed the horses and tore the carriage to bits—"

"Who was it?"

"The chief of police. From the Alexandrovsky station. There I was, and here he was. And that revolutionary stood just opposite. And just imagine, he was carrying an ordinary little package, done up in newspaper—"

"Did they catch him?"

"The revolutionary? Never! Everybody ran away and he did too. They say he was a sailor in disguise."

The woman ran off. Despite his grimness, Gavrik took Petya by the shoulder and did a couple of jig steps.

"That's the one who punched Grandpa's face," he said in a quick, fiery whisper. "That'll teach him to use his fists! Right?"

"Right," said Petya, turning cold.

That day the boys made two trips to the courtyard in Malaya Arnautskaya with the fountain and stork, where they took on "goods", as Gavrik called it.

The first time that they set out with the "goods" for the Alexandrovsky Prospect, which was cordoned off by troops, they were let through without any particular difficulty.

After passing several houses Gavrik led Petya through a gateway into a big deserted yard with a Cossack tethering post; the ground there was hard and frozen and studded with empty cartridge clips and cartridge cases that had been pressed into it by soldiers' boots.

They crossed the yard, went down into a cellar and walked for a long time in the damp darkness, past wood-bins, until they came out into another yard. From there they followed a narrow opening which led between two tall and gloomy brick walls into still another yard.

Gavrik obviously knew all the ins and outs here. The opening was so narrow that Petya, making his way behind Gavrik, found his satchel scraping against the walls. Finally they reached the other yard, which was as narrow and high and dark as a cistern.

Judging by the long distance they had come and the number of turns and zigzags, they were in the yard of a building that faced some other street.

The whole yard was strewn with broken glass and plaster.

The windows of the building were tightly shuttered. There seemed to be no one living in it.

A hollow silence hung in the air.

But beyond that silence, in the unknown street on the other side of the building, there was the alarming noise of some sort of movement, a noise more sensed than heard.

Besides, every now and then loud shots barked from above, seemingly from the sky, and they filled the yard with the echoings of a well. Petya pressed his back to the wall and, trembling, shut his eyes. But not so Gavrik.

Without hurrying he put two fingers in his mouth and whistled.

Somewhere up above a shutter banged. "Coming!" a voice called.

A minute later—to Petya it seemed an hour—a sweating red-faced man without an overcoat, in a jacket smeared with chalk, flung open the backstairs door.

Petya gasped. It was Terenti.

"Let's have it—quick!" Terenti muttered, wiping his wet face on his sleeve.

Paying no attention to Petya himself, Terenti went straight to the satchel.

"Thanks! Just in time! We didn't have a damn thing left!"

Breathing heavily, he unfastened the straps with impatient fingers and transferred the bags from the satchel to his pockets. "Tell Joseph Karlovich to send

some more right away," he called out as he ran back. "Bring everything there is or else we won't hold out."

"Right," said Gavrik.

Just then a bullet struck the wall near the roof, and a spray of pink brick dust came down on the boys.

They quickly retraced their route to Malaya Arnautskaya and took on another load of "goods". This time the satchel was so heavy that Petya staggered under its weight.

Now, of course, he knew very well what kind of lugs these were. At any other time he would have thrown the whole thing up and run home. But today his entire being was gripped by the thrill of danger, by a feeling more powerful even than the gambling fever, and not for anything in the world would he have deserted his pal. Besides, he would be able to share Gavrik's glory. The very thought that he might lose the right to tell about his adventures made him instantly disregard all danger.

Gavrik and Petya set out on the return trip. But how the city had changed in the meantime! Now it was seething.

One minute the streets would be filled with people running in all directions, and the next they would be swept clear in a flash by the iron broom of a fusillade.

As they approached the cordon Gavrik caught Petya by the arm and quickly pulled him into a gateway.

"Stop!"

"Why?"

Still holding Petya's arm Gavrik cautiously peeped out. The next instant he shrank back and pressed himself against the wall of the gateway, under the black board listing the tenants of that house.

"Listen, Petya, we're stuck. I just saw that skunk who nearly tore my ear off. Look, there he is."

Petya tiptoed to the edge of the gateway and looked out. At the cordon post a gentleman in a heavy overcoat and an astrakhan cap was walking up and down the roadway past the stacked rifles and the torn-up iron fence of the public garden. When he turned, Petya saw a coarse clean-shaven face and a fleshy nose. There was something very familiar about that unfamiliar face. He had seen it somewhere before. But where? Something prevented him from remembering. Could it be that bluish upper lip? Then suddenly he remembered. Of course, it was Moustaches! The man from the *Turgenev*, only now without the moustache. That face had impressed itself on Petya's memory for the rest of his life. He would have recognised it in a thousand, moustache or no moustache.

"It's Moustaches," whispered Petya, taking his place beside Gavrik, with his satchel pressed against the wall. "The one who was chasing the sailor. Only now he's without his moustache. Remember? I told you about him and you laughed at me."

"Shaved it off so nobody would know him. But he knows me, the rat," Gavrik said angrily. "We'll never get past."

"But perhaps we can."

"Not on your life."

Gavrik peeped out. "He's walking up and down."

He clenched his fist and angrily began to chew his knuckles. "And they're sitting there waiting for us. The dirty snake!"

There was a minute of deep and utter silence in the uprising, a silence broken by scattered shots in the distance. They reverberated over the roofs of the city.

"Listen, Petya," Gavrik said all of a sudden, "do you understand? They're sitting there waiting all for nothing— without the goods. They'll all be shot as easy as anything. And I can't go because that skunk is sure to follow me!"

Gavrik's eyes filled with tears of anger. He gave a loud sniff, blew his nose on the ground, and then looked angrily into Petya's eyes.

"Understand?"

"Uh-huh," said Petya with his lips alone, turning pale under his chum's angry, friendly, insistent and at the same time pleading look.

"Can you get through by yourself? You won't let 'em down?"

Petya's excitement was such that he could not get out a single word. He swallowed hard and nodded his head. Gavrik, first glancing round furtively and peeping out of the gateway, began to fill Petya's pockets with his bags.

"Give them all the goods, everything, you hear? What's in your satchel and what's in your pockets too. If you're caught shut up and say you found it in the street and don't know anything. Clear?"

"Uh-huh."

"When you hand it over come back here. I'll be waiting for you here in the gateway. Clear?"

"Uh-huh."

Petya, his pockets bulging, walked up to the cordon. He was so scared and excited he hardly knew what he was doing.

"Hey, where are you going? Are you blind?" Moustaches shouted, running up to him.

"Please," Petya whimpered in the thin voice he had learned from Gavrik, "please let me through. I live nearby, in the Alexandrovsky Prospect, in that big grey house, and my Mummy's awfully worried. She probably thinks I'm killed!"

Real tears poured out of his eyes and rolled down his plump grimy cheeks. Moustaches gave the little preparatory class pupil a disgusted look and took him by the satchel.

He led the boy to the edge of the roadway and gave him a light shove in the behind with his knee.

"Run along!"

Beside himself with joy, Petya raced towards the house.

38

HG OF THE FIGHTING GROUP

Petya slipped through the gateway and started across the yard.

When he came this way an hour earlier, with Gavrik, he had not been troubled by anything in particular. He knew he was under the reliable wing of a resourceful and experienced friend. He was freed from the necessity of thinking for himself; he was merely an obedient companion without a will of his own. Someone else, someone stronger than he, thought and acted for him.

Now he was completely alone. There was no one but himself to depend upon.

Without Gavrik the world around Petya immediately became threatening, huge, full of lurking dangers.

Danger skulked in the stone arches of the inner galleries, among the ominous boxes and the old broken furniture. It stood waiting in the middle of the yard, behind the mulberry tree whose trunk had been

gnawed by horses. It peered out of the black hole of the refuse-bin.

Everything the boy saw took on an exaggerated size. Huge Cossack horses pressed their smooth, golden, dancing cruppers against him. Monstrous tails swished across his satchel. Don Cossacks in blue breeches with red stripes hopped on one foot while the other was in the stirrup.

"From the right, by threes!" cried the hoarse voice of a Cossack ensign.

The mirror-like crescent of a drawn sabre hung in the air above the j aunty forage caps.

Petya went down into the cellar.

He walked a long time, feeling his way in the stuffy but cold darkness and breathing the dusty air of storage rooms. Every time a cobweb touched his eyelashes he took it for a bat's wing, and horror gripped him.

Finally he reached the second yard. It was deserted.

Only now, in the midst of this strange emptiness, did Petya become really aware of how terribly alone he was. He wanted to run back—but thousands of miles and thousands of fears separated him from the street, from Gavrik.

In the opening between the second and third yards it was so unbearably quiet that he felt like shouting with all his might; shouting desperately, passionately, frenziedly—anything so as not to hear that silence.

It was the kind of silence that comes only in the interval between two shots.

Now he had to put two fingers in his mouth and whistle. But suddenly he realised that he did not know how to whistle with his fingers. He had learned long ago to spit through his teeth, but not to whistle. He hadn't thought of it. It had slipped his mind.

Clumsily he put his fingers in his mouth and blew, but no whistle came out. In desperation he blew again, as hard as he could. Nothing. Only spittle and a hiss.

Then Petya mustered all his spiritual powers.

"Hey!" he yelled, closing his eyes.

His voice sounded very weak. Still, a booming echo instantly filled the empty cistern of a yard.

No one answered, however. The silence became more terrifying than ever.

High above there was a deafening crackle. Down flew the joint of a drain-pipe, carrying with it pieces of brick, spikes, and mortar.

"H-e-y! H-e-y! H-e-y!" Petya shouted at the top of his lungs.

A shutter in the top storey opened and an unfamiliar face looked out.

"What's all the shouting about? Bring it? Come up here! And be lively!"

The face disappeared.

Petya looked about in indecision. But he was all alone, with no one to advise him. There was another crackle overhead. A big chunk of plaster flew down and crashed into bits at Petya's feet.

Bending over, he dashed to the backstairs door. He started up the clanging iron stairway, tripping on the

hem of his overcoat; it had been bought several sizes too large, so that he could grow into it.

"Faster! Faster!" an angry voice cried from above.

The heavy satchel banged painfully against his back. The bulging pockets got in his way. He suddenly felt hot. The inside of his cap became warm and wet. Sweat poured down on his eyebrows and eyes. His face flamed.

Upstairs, the irritable, pleading voice kept shouting, "Faster! Faster, damn you!"

Petya breathed heavily, sticking out his tongue from the exertion. He had barely reached the third-storey landing when a man in an expensive but soiled overcoat with a lambskin collar grasped him by the shoulders.

The man was hatless and his forehead was plastered with strands of wet hair. He had a foppish little moustache and beard which didn't at all fit in with his ordinary, snub-nosed face, now red and powdered with plaster.

His eyes, under bushy brows white with plaster, had a gay, dare-devil gleam, and at the same time a sort of alarmed expression. He looked like a man who had been torn away from a very difficult and urgent job and was in a terrible hurry to get back to it.

When Petya felt the strong fingers grip his shoulders he thought the man was going to shake him, the way Daddy did when he was very angry. His legs buckled under him from fright. But the man looked affectionately into his eyes.

"Bring it?" he asked in a hurried whisper. Without waiting for an answer he pulled the boy into the empty kitchen of a flat where—as Petya sensed immediately — something tremendous and frightening was going on, something that usually never happened in flats.

The man ran his eyes over Petya and without saying a word went straight for his bulging pockets. He hastily pulled the heavy little bags out of them. Petya stood in front of him with his arms spread apart.

There was something very familiar about his unfamiliar face with the little moustache and beard.

Petya had surely seen it somewhere before. But when? Where?

He searched the recesses of his memory, but with no results. Something kept putting him off. Could it be the moustache and beard?

In the meantime the man had deftly extracted the four bags from the boy's pockets.

"Is that all?"

"No, there's more in the satchel."

"Good boy! Thanks! And just think—a Gymnasium pupil!"

As a sign of his admiration he gripped Petya's cap by the visor and pulled it down hard on top of his ears.

And now Petya saw, an inch from his nose, a strong sooty hand which gave off the sour smell of gunpowder. On it was a little blue anchor.

"The sailor!" he exclaimed.

But that same instant something crashed in the other part of the flat. There was a blast of air. A pot tumbled

from a shelf. With soft, cat-like steps the sailor ran into the passage, shouting, "Wait here!"

A minute later six jerky shots resounded somewhere close by. Petya threw off his satchel and began to unfasten it with trembling fingers.

Just then Terenti came into the kitchen from the passage. He was swaying on his feet. He was coatless, in a shirt with only one sleeve. The other sleeve was wound about his head. Blood trickled down his temple from under the bandage. He held a revolver in his right hand.

When he saw Petya he started to say something but waved his hand and first took a drink of water, putting his mouth to the tap.

"Bring it?" he asked, pausing for air between two gulps. The water flowed noisily over his startingly white face. "Where's Gavrik? Alive?"

"Uh-huh."

But there was obviously no time for questions. Without stopping to wipe his face Terenti took the bags out of the satchel.

"All the same we won't hold out," he muttered. He could scarcely stand on his feet. "We'll get away across the roofs. They're setting up a gun. You'd better clear out, kid, before a bullet gets you. Clear out quick. Thanks, and good luck!"

He sat down on a stool but a moment later got up, and, wiping his revolver on his knee, ran down the passage to the room from which came the steady bark of shots and the crash of glass.

Petya picked up his light satchel and ran to the door. Curiosity, however, made him pause for a minute and look down the passage. Through the wide-open door he saw a room piled with broken furniture.

In the middle of the wall, papered in a design of brown bouquets, he saw a yawning hole round which the lath framework was bared.

Several men were leaning against the sills of the smashed windows, firing one shot after another down into the street from their revolvers.

Petya saw Terenti's bandaged head and the sailor's lambskin collar. He also caught a glimpse of a shaggy black Caucasian cloak and a college student's cap.

The room swam and surged in bluish threads of smoke.

The sailor knelt at a windowsill on which stood a boudoir night table. He kept shoving out his arm, and it jerked as he fired shot after shot.

"Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!" he yelled madly.

In the midst of all that movement, chaos, commotion, and smoke only one man was completely calm—a man with a yellow, indifferent, waxen face, and a small black hole above his closed eyes.

He lay on the floor in the middle of the room, in an awkward pose, face up, surrounded by empty cartridge clips and cartridge cases.

His broken pince-nez, with the black cord looped behind his firm white ear, lay beside his head on the plaster-sprinkled parquet. A very old technological

student's cap with a cracked visor also lay neatly on the floor.

Petya looked at the man and suddenly realised that he was looking at a corpse.

He ran back. How he got out of the house and reached the gateway where Gavrik was waiting for him he did not remember.

"Well? Deliver it?"

"I did."

Breathlessly Petya told Gavrik everything he had seen in that terrifying flat.

"All the same they won't hold out. They'll get away across the roofs," he whispered, breathing heavily. "They're putting up a cannon against them."

Gavrik turned pale and made the sign of the cross. Never in his life had Petya seen his friend so scared.

Nearby, almost next to them, a gun roared. An iron echo rumbled over the roofs.

"Done for!" Gavrik cried in despair. "Hook it!"

The boys rushed out into the street and ran across the city, which had changed for the third time that morning.

Now the Cossacks were complete masters of the situation. The streets resounded with the clatter of hoofs.

Squadrons of Don Cossacks that had been lying low in the courtyards sped through the gateways, lashing out to the right and left with their whips.

There was no hiding from them: all the house-entrances and gateways had been locked tight and

were guarded by army and police details. Every alley was a trap.

The remnants of the dispersed demonstration scattered this way and that, without any hope of saving themselves. Cossacks overtook them and cut them down one by one.

In Malaya Arnautskaya a bow-legged man without a hat or coat ran down the middle of the roadway past the boys. Under his arm he held a stick with a red flag. It was the owner of the shooting gallery. He ran limping and dodging from side to side.

At any other time this sight might have surprised the boys, but now it only filled them with horror.

Every ten paces or so Joseph Karlovich turned back a terribly pale, tormented face with wild eyes. Two Don Cossacks were bearing down upon him at a fast trot.

The horseshoes rang loud against the granite cobbles, drawing sparks that were pale in the daylight.

A minute later Joseph Karlovich was between the two horses. He let them pass, slipped aside, and then dashed up to a door and seized the handle.

The door was locked. He tugged at it in desperation, kicked it with all his might, rammed it with his shoulder. It did not yield. The Cossacks turned their horses and rode up on the pavement.

Joseph Karlovich hunched himself over, bent his head and pressed the flag to his breast with both hands. A sabre flashed. His back jerked. His jacket

split open crosswise. With a convulsive movement he turned round.

For a second his pain-distorted face with its short side-whiskers was seen.

"Scoundrels! Satraps! Butchers!" he cried passionately, at the top of his voice. "Down with the autocracy!"

But at that very instant two sabres flashed through the air, sharply and simultaneously. Joseph Karlovich fell, still pressing the banner to his open hairy chest with the blue tattooing.

One of the Don Cossacks bent over him and did something.

A minute later the two Cossacks were galloping on, dragging the man's body behind them on a rope. It left a long, red, astonishingly bright trail on the deathly-grey cobbles.

A crowd rushed out of a side street and separated the boys.

39

THE POGROM

Petya lost all sense of time that day.

When he finally reached home he had the feeling that it was already dusk, but actually it was not yet two o'clock.

Near Kulikovo Field and the Army Staff building all was quiet. The events in town reached this district as rumours and distant firing. But everyone was long since used to rumours and firing.

The sky was low and almost black and gave off the sharp cold breath of approaching snow. On days like that, evening began in the morning. A few tiny snowflakes had already flown by in the misty bluish air, but the hard earth was still a solid black, without a single fleck of grey.

Petya came in by the back door, dropped his empty satchel in the kitchen and tiptoed to the nursery. But it was too early for anyone to have begun worrying about his absence.

When he saw the quiet, peaceful rooms, when he heard the faint whirr of the sewing machine, when he smelled the simmering borshch, he suddenly wanted to throw his arms round Daddy's neck, press his cheek against his jacket, burst into tears, and tell all.

But only for an instant. That feeling immediately yielded, in the boy's feverish mind, to another, a new, feeling: one of reserve, responsibility, secrecy. For the first time in his life the boy understood, simply and seriously, with all his heart, that there were things not to be told even to one's nearest and dearest, but kept to oneself, no matter how painful it might be.

Father was rocking in the rocking-chair, with his hands behind his head and his pince-nez dangling free. Petya walked in, sat down on a chair beside him, and folded his hands sedately on his knees.

"Bored with being idle, son? Don't take it to heart. Things will quieten down soon, the schools will open again. You'll go back to the Gymnasium, get your fill of Poors, and then you'll feel better."

He smiled his lovable, nearsighted smile.

Suddenly the kitchen door banged and swift footsteps sounded in the passage. Dunya appeared in the dining-room doorway. She leaned limply against the door, clasping her hands to her breast.

Oh, sir—

She could not get out another word.

She was breathing heavily, quickly, her half-open mouth swallowing in air. Her kerchief was awry; a strand of hair with a pin hanging from it fell on her ghostly-white face.

Lately the family had become used to seeing her burst in like this. Almost every day she came to announce some piece of town news or other. But this time her crazed eyes, her convulsive breathing and her general overwrought appearance predicted something extraordinary, something frightful.

She brought in with her such a dark, such an ominous silence that it seemed as if the clock had begun to tick ten times louder, and as if grey panes had been put into the windows. The whirr of the sewing machine stopped instantly. Auntie Tatyana ran in, pressing her fingers to the tiny blue veins in her temples.

"What is it? What's happened?"

Dunya moved her lips but no sound came out.

When she did speak it was in a voice that could barely be heard. "In Kanatnaya they're beating up the Jews. A pogrom—"

"Impossible!" Auntie Tatyana clutched at her heart and sank into a chair.

"May I drop dead on the spot! They're smashing all the Jewish shops. They threw a chest of drawers into the street from the first storey. They'll be in our street in about ten minutes."

Father jumped up. He was pale, his jaw quivered. He tried to put on his pince-nez but his hand refused to obey him.

"Good Lord! What does this mean?"

He raised his eyes to the icon and crossed himself twice.

Dunya, taking that for a sign, came to herself. She climbed on a chair and impetuously took down the icon.

"Dunya, what are you doing?"

But Dunya made no reply. She was already in the other rooms collecting the icons. She quickly set them on the windowsills facing the street, propping them up with piles of books, boxes, tea-caddies, and anything else she could lay hands on.

Father followed her with a perplexed look.

"I don't see— What's the point of all that?"

"That's what to do, sir," she mumbled in a frightened voice. "They're beating up the Jews but they don't touch Russians. Whoever has icons in the windows they leave them alone."

"Don't you dare!" he screamed, his voice breaking. He pounded the table with his fist as hard and as fast as he could. "Don't you dare! I forbid it! Do you hear? Stop it this very minute! That's not what icons are for! It's—it's blasphemy! At once!"

Father's round starched cuffs jumped out of his sleeves. His face turned deathly pale. Pink spots broke out on his high chiselled forehead.

Never had Petya seen Father like this: his whole body shook, he was terrifying.

Father ran to the window and seized an icon. But Dunya pounced on it and would not let go.

"Oh, don't, sir!" she cried in despair. "They're killing everybody!" She turned to Auntie. "Tatyana Ivanovna! Dear Tatyana Ivanovna! They'll kill us all! They won't think twice!"

"Shut up!" yelled Father. The veins on his forehead swelled frighteningly. "Shut up! I'm the master here. It's my house and I'll never permit that here! Let them come! Let them murder us all! The swine! You have no right— you have no—"

Auntie Tatyana wrung her hands.

"Vasili Petrovich, I implore you, be calm!"

But Father had already buried his face in his hands and stood leaning against the wall.

"They're coming!" Dunya cried.

Silence fell.

Faint, harmonious singing drifted in from the street. It sounded like a religious procession or a funeral somewhere in the distance.

Cautiously, Petya looked out of the window. There was not a soul in the street. Over the deserted Kulikovo Field hung a sky the colour of slate, darker and lower than before.

In the wrinkles of the naked earth lay a few long strands of snow as light as swan's down, collected by the wind.

The singing grew louder and louder. Now Petya clearly saw that the low dark cloud lying on the horizon in Kulikovo Field, to the right of the railway station, was not a cloud at all but a slowly approaching mob.

The windows in the house were slammed shut.

From the kitchen came the murmur of low, restrained voices, a shuffling, and the rustle of skirts. Then, altogether unexpectedly, an elderly woman appeared in the passage holding by the hand a little girl with bright ginger hair and a tear-stained face.

The woman was dressed for paying a social call, in a black silk skirt, a mantilla, and lisle mitts. Somewhat askew on her head sat *a* small but high black bonnet with cock's plumes. From behind her shoulders peered Nusya's pale, lustreless, round face and Izzy the Dizzy's bowler hat.

This was Madam Kogan, with her whole family.

Not daring to enter the room, she stood for a long time curtsying in the doorway, raising the hem of her skirt with one hand and pressing the other to her heart. A honeyed, well-bred and at the same time frenzied smile played on her wrinkled mobile little face.

"Mr. Batchei!" she exclaimed in a shrill, bird-like voice, stretching out both her trembling gloved hands towards Father. "Mr. Batchei! Tatyana Ivanovna! We have always been good neighbours! Are people to blame because they have a different God?"

All of a sudden she fell to her knees.

"Save my children!" she wailed. "Let them smash everything but only let them spare my children!"

"Mama, stop lowering yourself!" Nusya cried angrily. He shoved his hands in his pockets and turned aside, showing the bluish shaven nape of his neck.

"Nusya, will you shut up at last?" hissed Izzy the Dizzy. "Or do you want that I should slap your cheeks? Your mother knows what she is doing. She knows that Mr. Batchei is an intellectual person and will not allow us to be killed."

Auntie Tatyana ran to the door and lifted the Jewess to her feet. "Why, Madam Kogan, what ever are you doing? For shame! Why, of course, of course! Goodness me! Please come in, Mr. Kogan, Nusya, Dorochka— What a misfortune!"

While Madam Kogan wept and gushed words of gratitude that made Father and Auntie Tatyana feel so ashamed they wished the earth would swallow them up, and while she hid the children and her husband in the back rooms, the singing outside grew louder and nearer with every step.

A small crowd which indeed looked like a religious procession was coming across Kulikovo Field towards the house.

In front walked two grey-haired old men in winter coats but hatless, carrying a portrait of the Tsar on an embroidered linen towel. Petya at once recognised the blue ribbon across the shoulder and the acorn which was the Tsar's face. Behind the portrait swayed church banners, raised high in the cold, bluish, soapy air.

Then came a lot of respectable-looking men and women in winter overcoats and galoshes, high overshoes and top boots. White steam poured from their wide-open mouths. They sang:

Save, O Lo-o-o-ord, Thy flo-o-ock, and bless Thy do-o-o-omains. . . .

They looked so peaceable and dignified that for a minute an indecisive smile played on Father's face.

"There, you see?" he said. "They're walking along quietly and peacefully without hurting a soul, and you —"

Just then the procession came to a stop on the other side of the street, opposite the house. Out of the crowd ran a burly, moustached woman with purplish-blue cheeks and two shawls tied across her bosom. Her bulging eyes, black as Isabella grapes, stared with ferocious determination at the windows. She planted her fat legs in their thick white woollen stockings wide apart, like a man, and shook her fist at the house.

"Aha, Jew-faces!" she cried in the shrill voice of a market woman. "Hiding, eh? Never mind, we'll get you in a jiffy! Orthodox Christians, show your icons!"

With these words she raised the hem of her skirt and ran across the street with a determined air. On the way she picked a cobblestone from a pile that had been put there for mending the roadway.

After her, about twenty long-armed roughs with tri-coloured ribbons on their overcoats and jackets stepped out of the crowd. They crossed the street without hurrying, one ofter the other, and as each passed the pile of cobbles he bent low and nimbly.

When the last one passed, the place where the pile of stones had stood was absolutely smooth ground.

A deathly silence set in. Each tick of the clock was now the crash of a pistol-shot, and the panes in the windows were black. The silence dragged out so long that Father had time to say, "I don't understand. Where, after all, are the police? Why don't they send men from the Army Staff?"

"Oh, the police!" Auntie Tatyana cried hysterically.

She stopped short.

The silence became more terrifying than ever. Izzy the Dizzy sat on the edge of a chair in the middle of the parlour, his bowler hat pushed down on his forehead. His sickly eyes were fixed on a spot in the corner.

Nusya had been walking up and down the passage with his hands in his pockets. Now he stopped to listen. His full lips were curved in a strained, scornful smile.

The silence lasted another unbearable instant and then burst. Somewhere down below the first rock

slammed through a window. Then a squall hit the house. Glass shattered to the pavement. The iron sign-board was ripped off with a thunderous rattle. There was the crash of breaking doors and boxes. Jars of lozenges, kegs, and tinned goods rolled out into the roadway.

Whistling and whooping, the brutalised mob surrounded the house. The gold-framed portrait with the crown soared slantwise into the air, now here, now there. It was as if an officer in epaulets and a blue ribbon across his shoulder, with church banners on all sides of him, was rising up on tiptoe all the time to look over the heads.

"Mr. Batchei! Do you see what they're doing?" whispered Kogan, wringing his hands. "Two hundred rubles' worth of merchandise!"

"Papa, keep quiet! Stop lowering yourself!" shouted Nusya. "This isn't a question of money!" The pogrom continued.

"Sir! They're going through the flats looking for Jews!" Madam Kogan screamed. She began to flutter in the dark passage like a chicken at sight of the knife. "Dora! Nusya! My children!" "They're coming up the stairs, sir!"

From the stairs sounded the rumble of coarse voices and boots, amplified tenfold by the box-like front entrance. With trembling fingers, yet extraordinarily quickly, Father buttoned all the buttons of his jacket and rushed to the door, tearing open with both hands the choking starched collar under his beard. Before

Auntie Tatyana could open her mouth he was on the stairs. "For goodness' sake, Vasili Petrovich!" "Don't sir, they'll kill you!" "Daddy!" cried Petya, rushing after him. In his black jacket, straight and agile, his face set, his cuffs rattling, Father quickly ran downstairs.

Up the stairs towards him clumped the woman in the thick white woollen stockings. She wore cotton mitts, and in her right hand she gripped a heavy cobblestone. Now her eyes were not black but a bluish-white, and glazed, like the eyes of a dead bullock. Behind her came sweating roughs in dark-blue caps, the kind grocers' assistants wore.

"Gentlemen!" Father cried, not at all to the point, in his high falsetto, his neck turning a deep red. "Who gave you the right to break into other people's houses? This is robbery! I won't allow it!"

"And who might you be? The house-owner?"

The woman shifted the cobblestone to her left hand, and, without looking at Father, hit him in the ear with her right fist as hard as she could. Father rocked on his heels, but the men prevented him from falling: a red, freckled hand grabbed him by the silk lapel of his jacket and jerked him forward. The old cloth ripped.

"Stop hitting him! He's our Daddy!" Petya cried in a voice totally unlike his own. "You have no right! Fools!"

Somebody gave a sharp, vicious pull, with all his might, at Father's sleeve. The sleeve came off. The round cuff with its cuff-link rolled down the stairs. Petya saw a bleeding scratch on Father's nose, saw his

nearsighted eyes full of tears—his pince-nez had been knocked off— and his hair, long like a seminary student's, lying in two dishevelled parts.

Stinging pain filled the boy's heart. He was ready to die at that minute if only they would stop hurting Daddy.

"Beasts! Cattle! Animals!" Father moaned through set teeth, backing away from the pogrom-makers.

Auntie Tatyana and Dunya came running down holding icons.

"Gentlemen, what are you doing? Have you no fear of God?" Auntie Tatyana said over and over again, tears in her eyes.

"Are you mad?" Dunya cried in rage, lifting as high as she could an icon of the Saviour with waxen orange-blossoms under the glass. "You're beating Orthodox Christians! Look what you're doing before you begin. Go back where you came from. There's no Jews here, not a one! Go away!"

Police whistles sounded in the street—as usual, exactly half an hour after the start of a pogrom. The woman in the white stockings put the cobblestone on a step and carefully wiped her hand on the hem of her skirt.

"Well, that'll do for here," she said with a nod of the head. "A little of a good thing goes a long way. Hear those policemen of ours blowing out their guts? Come on, now let's get that Jew at Malofontanskaya and the corner of Botanicheskaya!"

She gathered her heavy skirts and, grunting, climbed downstairs.

40

THE OFFICER'S UNIFORM

For several days afterwards the pavement in front of the house was strewn with cobbles, broken glass, splintered boxes, crushed balls of blueing, rice, rags, and various household articles.

Among the bushes in the field one suddenly came across a picture album, a bamboo book stand, a lamp, a flat-iron.

Passers-by carefully avoided the wreckage, as if mere contact with it would make a person a party to the pogrom and disgrace him for life.

The children too. When, horror-struck and curious, they went down into the pillaged shop, they deliberately hid their hands in their pockets so as not to be tempted by a mint cake or a crushed box of Kerch cigarettes lying about.

Father paced the floor from morning to night, his chin tensely thrust forward; he looked somehow younger, sterner, and was unusually brisk; he had become noticeably grey at the temples. The jacket had been mended so skilfully that there was scarcely any trace of the damage. Life was becoming normal again.

There was no more firing in the streets. Peaceful silence reigned in the city. The first tram-car since the strike rolled past the house. It was a clumsy, absurd contraption which looked like a city coach, with huge rear wheels and tiny front ones.

An engine whistled at the railway station. The *Russkiye Vedomosti,* the *Niva* and the *Zadushevnoye Slovo* were delivered to the house.

One day Petya looked out of the window and saw a yellow postal van at the entrance.

A warm wave flooded his heart, and it missed a beat. The postman opened the door at the back of the van and took out a parcel.

"It's from Grandma!" Petya cried, smacking the windowsill with his palms.

Why, he had forgotten all about it! Now, at sight of the yellow van, he instantly remembered: lugs, the dress coat he had turned into a total mess, the sandals he had sold, Pavlik's moneybox—in a word, all his crimes, which might come to light at any moment.

The bell rang. Petya ran to the anteroom.

"Don't you dare touch it! It's for me, for me!"

And so it was, to everybody's amazement. "Master Pyotr Batchei. Personal" was written in big letters in purple ink on the canvas top.

The canvas was tightly sewn down with strong thread and Petya split his fingernails as he tore it off. He did not have the patience to do a neat job of removing the squeaking cover, which was held in place by long thin nails, so he grabbed the kitchen chopper

and hacked the box open; it was as fragile as a violin. Out of it he took something carefully wrapped in a very old copy of the *Russky Invalid.*

It was an officer's jacket.

"Grandfather's uniform!" Petya exclaimed triumphantly. "There!"

Nothing else was in the parcel.

"I—I don't see—" mumbled Auntie.

"What a queer idea, sending military relics to a child," Father remarked dryly, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Highly unpedagogical."

"Oh, keep quiet! You don't understand anything! Grandma's a wonder!" Petya shouted in delight. He ran to the nursery with the precious parcel.

Gold buttons gleamed through their neat wrapping of tissue-paper. Petya hastily undid the wrapping.

My God! What was this? No eagles!

The buttons were absolutely smooth. They differed in no way from the cheapest lugs on the uniforms of ordinary privates. True, Petya found sixteen of them. But the whole batch would bring him no more than three fives.

What could have happened?

Many years later Petya was to learn that in the time of Emperor Alexander II officers' buttons were without eagles. But who could have foreseen it? He felt completely crushed.

Petya sat on the windowsill with the useless uniform in his lap. Outside, snow-flakes were flying past the thermometer. He watched them indifferently,

without a trace of the joy he usually felt at the first snow.

One after another there passed before his mind's eye pictures of the events he had taken part in and witnessed only a short time before. But now it all seemed as distant, as hazy, and as untrue as a dream. As if it all had taken place in some other town; perhaps, even, in some other country.

Yet Petya knew that it had not been a dream. It had taken place over there, not far away, beyond Kulikovo Field, beyond the milky smoke of snow that whirled along between sky and earth.

Where was Gavrik now?

What had happened to Terenti and the sailor?

Had they got away across the roofs?

But there was no answer to these questions.

The snow came down thicker and thicker, covering the black earth of Kulikovo Field with the clean, bright sheet of winter, come at last.

41

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Christmas came.

Pavlik awoke before dawn. For him Christmas Eve was a double holiday: it was his birthday, too.

You can easily imagine how impatiently the boy had awaited this joyous and at the same time most curious day when he suddenly became four years old.

One day he was still three, and the next he was four. When did that happen? Probably at night.

Pavlik had decided long ago to watch for the mysterious moment when children become a year older. He woke up in the middle of the night and opened his eyes wide, but as far as he could see nothing had changed. Everything was the same as usual: the chest of drawers, the night-lamp, the dry palm branch behind the icon.

How old was he now: three, or four?

He examined his arms attentively and gave a kick with his legs under the blanket. No, his arms and legs were the same as when he had gone to bed in the evening. But perhaps his head had grown a bit? He carefully felt his head—his cheeks, his nose, his ears. . . . They all seemed to be the same as yesterday.

Now wasn't that strange?

It was all the more strange because in the morning he was sure to be four. That he knew for certain. Then

how old was he now? He couldn't still be three. But on the other hand it didn't look very much like four, either.

It would be a good idea to wake Daddy. He was sure to know. But crawl out from under the warm quilt and walk barefoot across the floor—no, thanks! A better idea was to pretend to be asleep and wait with closed eyes for the transformation to take place.

Pavlik shut his eyes, but before he knew it he fell asleep. When he woke up he saw at once that the night-lamp had gone out a long time ago and that the dark, bluish light of early-early winter morning was coming in through the cracks in the shutters.

Now there couldn't be the slightest doubt: he was four.

The whole flat was still fast asleep; Dunya had not yet begun to bustle about in the kitchen. Four-year-old Pavlik sprang nimbly out of bed and "dressed himself" —that is, he pulled on his vest, with the cloth-covered buttons, back to front and shoved his bare little feet into his shoes.

Cautiously opening the heavy, squeaky door with both hands, he set out for the parlour. It was a little boy's big journey through a deserted flat. In the middle of the darkness, filling the entire parlour with the strong smell of fir needles, stood something huge and vague, with black paws reaching all the way to the floor and hung with dangling chains of paper.

This, Pavlik already knew, was the Christmas tree. While his eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom he

cautiously walked round the thick velvety tree whose silver threads cast the faintest possible flickers of light.

The tree echoed the boy's every step with a papery stir, a tremble, a rustle of cardboard and of Christmas crackers, a delicate tinkle of glass decorations.

Now that he was accustomed to the darkness Pavlik saw, in the corner, a table heaped with presents. He rushed to it, forgetting the tree for a moment. They were first-rate presents, much better than what he had expected: a bow with arrows in a velvet quiver, a beautiful book with coloured pictures, *Grandma Tatyana's Poultry Yard,* a real "grown-up" lotto game, and a horse which was bigger, handsomer, and, most important of all, much newer than Kudlatka. Besides, there were tins of George Borman Lozenges, bars of chocolate with picture cards, and a cake in a round box.

Pavlik had never expected such riches. The table was laden with toys and sweets—and all his very own.

Still, he felt that something was lacking. He quietly dragged all his old toys, including the tattered Kudlatka, into the parlour from the nursery and added them to the new ones. Now there were as many toys as in a shop. But even this did not seem enough.

He brought out the famous moneybox and put it on top of the drum in the middle of the table, as the chief symbol of his wealth.

After building this triumphal toy tower and feasting his eyes upon it, Pavlik returned to the Christmas tree. For a long time now a honey cake covered with pink

frosting, hanging not very high at all, by a yellow worsted thread, had been disturbing him. It was shaped like a star and had a hole in the middle, and it was so beautiful that he felt an overpowering desire to eat it as quickly as possible.

Deciding that it would be no great harm if there were one honey cake less on the tree, Pavlik untied it from the branch and put it in his mouth. He took a sizable bite, but to his amazement he discovered that the cake was not at all as tasty as one might have thought. As a matter of fact, it was a simply disgusting cake: it was stale, it was made of rye flour, it wasn't sweet, and it had a strong smell of treacle. And yet by the looks of it, it was the kind of cake the snow-white Christmas angels, who sang so sweetly high up in heaven, lived on.

With a grimace Pavlik hung the nibbled cake back on the branch. There was clearly some misunderstanding here. No doubt a spoiled cake had been put in with the others by accident in the shop.

At this point Pavlik noticed another and still more beautiful honey cake, covered with blue frosting. It hung quite high, and he had to pull up a chair. This time he did not untie the cake from the branch but simply bit off a corner. It was so unpleasant that he spat it out at once.

But it was hard to believe that all the other cakes were worthless too.

Pavlik decided to try every single one. No sooner said than done. Grunting, wheezing, his tongue

sticking out, he dragged the heavy chair round the tree, climbed up on it, bit off a corner of a cake, saw that it was foul, and dragged the chair farther.

Before long he had tasted all the honey cakes except two near the very ceiling and far out of reach. For a long time he stood with his head bent back, thinking about them. They attracted him because they were beyond reach, and hence all the more beautiful and desirable.

These cakes, he was certain, would not trick him. He was planning how to put the chair on top of the table and try to get them from there when he heard the fresh rustle of a holiday dress. Auntie Tatyana's beaming face looked into the parlour.

"Aha, our little birthday-boy is up before everybody else, I see. What are you doing?"

"Walking round the Christmas twee," Pavlik replied modestly. He looked up at Auntie Tatyana with the trusting, truthful eyes of a well-behaved child.

"Oh, my precious little tadpole! Twee! Not *twee* but *tree*. When will you finally learn to say that word properly? Well, happy birthday!"

The next moment the boy found himself in Auntie Tatyana's warm, fragrant, tender embrace.

Dunya, her face flushed with embarrassment, hurried in from the kitchen, holding out a dainty sky-blue cup with "Happy Birthday" written on it in gold letters.

So began that happy day which was destined to have such an absolutely unexpected and frightful ending.

In the evening, Pavlik had guests—little boys and girls. They were all such kids that Petya felt it beneath his dignity to talk to them, let alone play with them.

Petya's heart was unutterably sad and heavy as he sat on the windowsill in the dark nursery, looking at the decoratively frosted window on which the golden nut of the street lamp glimmered among icy ferns.

Ominous forebodings darkened his spirits.

From the parlour streamed the hot, crackling light of the Christmas tree—a flaming bonfire of candles and golden rain. He could hear the enticing music of the piano. That was Father pounding out a seminary polka, the tails of his dress coat spread apart and his starched cuffs rattling. A great many children's sturdy little legs were stamping senselessly round the Christmas tree.

"Never mind, Petya," said Auntie Tatyana as she passed by. " Don't be envious. You'll have your day too."

"Oh, Auntie, you don't understand anything at all," the boy said in a piteous voice. "Leave me alone."

At last came that long-awaited moment—the distribution of the nuts and cakes. The children surrounded the Christmas tree on tiptoe and stretched their hands towards the cakes, which shone like medals. The tree rocked. The chains rustled.

"Oh, look," a ringing, frightened little voice suddenly said, "somebody's bitten my cake!"

"Mine too!"

"I have two, and they're all bitten."

"Huh," someone said in disappointment, "they're not new at all. They've been eaten once already."

Auntie Tatyana flushed to the roots of her hair as nibbled cakes were stretched out to her from all sides.

Finally her eyes came to rest on Pavlik. "Did *you* do that, you naughty boy?"

"Auntie dear, I only wanted a teeny-weeny taste," Pavlik looked innocently at his angered aunt with wide-open eyes that were amber-coloured from the Christmas tree lights. "I thought," he added with a sigh, "they were good, but it turns out they're only for guests."

"That's enough, you bad, bad boy!" Auntie Tatyana cried. With a gesture of despair she ran to the sideboard. Luckily, there was still plenty of other sweets. Satisfaction was immediately given to all who had been slighted. The scandal was hushed.

Soon the sleepy guests were carried away to their homes. The party was over. Pavlik set about putting his treasures in order.

Just then Dunya appeared in the doorway of the nursery with a mysterious air and beckoned to Petya.

"Young master, that crazy Gavrik is waiting for you in the back stairway," she whispered, glancing round.

Petya dashed into the kitchen.

Gavrik was sitting on the high backstairs sill, leaning against the icy window on which danced blue

sparks from the moon. Under his hood glittered small angry eyes. He was breathing heavily.

Petya's first thought was that Gavrik had come to collect his debt. He was about to tell the sad story of Grandfather's buttons and promise honour bright to settle the debt in two days, at the latest, when Gavrik quickly reached inside his padded jacket and pulled out four familiar-looking bags.

"Here," he said in a low, firm voice, handing them to Petya. "Hide these and we'll call it quits. They're left over from Joseph Karlovich, God rest his soul."

As he said these last words Gavrik fervently made the sign of the cross.

"Hide them and keep 'em until they're needed."

"Right," whispered Petya.

Gavrik said nothing for a long time. Finally he wiped his nose hard with his fist and climbed down from the windowsill.

"Well, Petya, so long."

"Did—did they get away?"

"They did. Across the roofs. Now they're looking for 'em high and low."

Gavrik paused for a moment, considering whether he hadn't said too much. Then he leaned forward trustfully.

"If you only knew how many were caught!" he whispered into Petya's ear. "But *they* won't be caught! Take my word for it. They're hiding in the catacombs. Like all the revolutionaries. In the spring they'll start again. You know, the landlord's throwing Terenti's wife

and the kids, Zhenechka and Motya, out in the street. That's the way things are."

Gavrik scratched his eyebrows with a worried air.

"I don't know what to do with 'em now. Looks as we'll all have to move from Near Mills to Grandpa's hut. Grandpa's in a bad way. Looks as if he's going to die soon. Why don't you drop in some day, Petya? Only not so soon. The main thing is to hide these bags in a good place. 'Weep no more, Marusya, you will yet be mine.' Shake, pal."

Gavrik shoved a flat hand into Petya's and then ran off, beating a tattoo on the stairs with his broken boots.

Petya went back to the nursery and hid the bags under the books in his satchel.

Just then the door flew open with an unearthly bang and Father marched into the room holding the mutilated dress coat.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked in such a quiet voice that Petya nearly fainted.

"By the true and holy Cross—" he muttered, but he could not gather up the strength to cross himself.

"What's the meaning of this?" Father shouted, turning red and shaking from head to foot.

That very second Pavlik let out a heart-rending howl in the parlour, as though echoing Father's angry shout.

The little boy ran in on legs wobbling from horror and threw his arms round Father's knees. His mouth was such a wide-open square that his yelling throat, with its tiny, quivering lobe at the back, could clearly

be seen. The tears came in streams. In his trembling hand lay the open moneybox, full of bits of tin and iron instead of money.

"D-da-da-dy," babbled Pavlik, hiccuping. "Pe-etya — rob—hie—robbed me!"

"On my word of hon—" began Petya, but Father already had a firm grip on his shoulders.

"You good-for-nothing!" he roared. "You scalawag! I know everything! You're a gambler, and a liar besides!"

He began to shake Petya—so furiously that it seemed he wanted to shake the very life out of the boy. His jaw bounced up and down, and so did his pince-nez, which had slipped from his perspiring nose with its cork-like pores, and dangled on the black cord.

"Give them to me this very instant, those—what do you call 'em—mugs, jugs—"

"Lugs," Petya said with a crooked smile, hoping somehow to turn the matter into a joke.

But when Father heard the word "lugs" from the lips of his son he flew into a still greater rage.

"Lugs, eh? Excellent! Where are they? Give them here this very minute. Where is that street filth? Where are those germs? Into the fire with them! Into the stove! I don't want to see a single trace of them!"

He took in the room with a swift glance and then made straight for the satchel.

Father walked down the passage with long, quick, nervous strides, carrying the bags squeamishly, as

though they were dead kittens. Petya, sobbing, ran after him all the way to the kitchen.

"Daddy! Daddy!" he shouted, tugging at his sleeves. "Daddy!"

Father roughly pushed Petya aside, moved a clattering pot and fiercely shoved the bags into the flaming stove, getting soot on his cuffs.

The boy froze in horror.

"Hook it!" he screamed.

But at that instant shots resounded inside the stove, followed by a small explosion.

A multicoloured flame shot through the stove ring. Noodles flew up out of the pot and plastered themselves against the ceiling. The stove cracked. Out of the crack poured acrid smoke, filling the entire kitchen in one minute.

They flooded the stove. Later, when they raked out the ashes, they found a pile of charred revolver cartridge cases.

But Petya knew none of this. He had fainted. They put him to bed. His whole body was on fire. When they took his temperature it was one hundred and three and five-tenths.

42

KULIKOVO FIELD

No sooner had the scarlet fever passed when pneumonia set in.

Petya was ill all winter. Only in the middle of Lent did he begin to walk about inside the house.

Spring was on the way. First early spring—in fact, early-early spring. No longer winter but by no means real spring.

The short-lived southern snow had long since vanished, without giving Petya a taste of its delights. It was now the dry, grey Odessa March.

On shaky legs, Petya wandered idly through the rooms which had become small and very low the minute he climbed out of bed. He stood on tiptoe in front of the pier-glass in the dark anteroom and with a tug of self-pity examined his peaky white face with the shadows under eyes that seemed somehow startled and hard to recognise.

The whole first half of the day he was all alone in the flat. Father was at school, and Auntie Tatyana took Pavlik out walking.

The noises of the deserted rooms made Petya pleasantly light-headed. The sharp click of the pendulum came with a persistent, frightening inevitability. Petya went to the window. It was still sealed for the winter; there was a roll of yellowed cotton wool sprinkled with pieces of clipped worsted between the two frames.

He saw the mean, grey, dry roadway, the hard earth of Kulikovo Field, and a grey sky with the faintest watery traces of blue. From the kitchen window he

could see the blue twigs of the lilacs in the vacant lot. He knew that if you stripped the bitter bark with your teeth you would uncover a wonderfully green, pistachio-coloured stem.

At long intervals the low, funereal bass of the Lenten bells quivered in the air, bringing to the heart a feeling of emptiness and sadness.

Yet latent in this bleak world were the powerful forces of spring. They were merely awaiting their hour. They could be felt in everything, and most of all in the hyacinth bulbs.

The indoor spring was still hidden in the dark storeroom, where, amid the mousy odour of household odds and ends, Auntie Tatyana had placed shallow little bowls along the wall. The Dutch bulbs, Petya knew, needed darkness in order to sprout. And in the darkness of the storeroom the mystery of growth was taking place.

Pale but firm spears were cutting their way through the silken, wasted husks of the bulbs. He knew that just in time for Easter, taut, bushy, pale pink, white and purple hyacinth flowers would miraculously appear on the thick stems.

In the meantime, Petya's child's heart was lonely and numb in this grey, desolate world of the vernal equinox.

The days were growing longer, Now he had nothing to fill the incredibly dragging hours between dinner and evening. How long they were, those dreary hours

of the equinox! Even longer than the deserted streets stretching endlessly in the direction of Near Mills.

Petya was now allowed to stroll about near the house. He walked slowly up and down the dry pavement, squinting at the sun as it set beyond the railway station.

Only a year ago he had looked upon the station as the end of town. Beyond it lay geography. But now he knew that the town continued beyond the station, that there were the long, dusty streets of the suburbs. He clearly pictured them, reaching away to the west.

In the distance, filling the broad space between two dreary brick houses, hung a monstrous red sun from the times when the Earth was young; it gave off no rays, yet its sharp, sullen light blinded you.

Two weeks before Easter, wagon-loads of timber were brought to Kulikovo Field. Carpenters, navvies, and foremen appeared. Tape-lines were stretched over the ground in all directions. Contractors with yellow folding footrules in their outside pockets paced off sections of land. The construction of booths for the Easter fair had begun.

Petya's greatest pleasure was to wander among the boxes of big nails, the axes, saws, logs and shavings, and to guess what would be built where in Kulikovo Field. Each new row of posts, each new trench, each lot measured by tape-line and marked off with pegs excited his imagination.

His soaring fantasy drew pictures of amazingly beautiful booths full of wonders and mysteries, while

levelheaded experience told him that it would all be the same as last year. No better and no worse. But his fantasy could not reconcile itself to that; it demanded something new, something never seen before.

He loitered about near the workers and contractors in the hope of getting some information out of them.

"I say there, could you tell me what this is going to be?"

"A booth, naturally."

"I know, but what kind?"

"Wooden, naturally."

Petya chuckled, to flatter the man.

"I know that too. You *do* say funny things! But what will there be inside? A circus?"

"That's right."

"But how? Doesn't a circus have to be round?"

"Then it won't be a circus."

"Will it be a waxworks?"

"That's right."

"Such a tiny booth?"

"Then it won't be a waxworks."

"But *really.* What will it be?"

"A privy."

Petya blushed but then chuckled all the louder. He was willing to endure any humiliation as long as he found out at least something.

"Ha-ha-ha! But really, what are you building here?"

"Run along, kid, this ain't no place for you. You'll be late to school."

"I don't go to school yet. I had scarlet fever, and pneumonia too."

"Then go to bed instead of making a pest of yourself here."

With a forced grin Petya sauntered off, racking his brains over the insoluble problem.

For it was a known fact that before the booths were roofed with canvas and hung with pictures nothing could be learned. It was impossible to tell—as impossible as trying to guess the colour of the hyacinth that would blossom out on the pale stem by Easter Sunday.

On Holy Saturday, highly mysterious green crates and trunks labelled "Handle with Care" were brought to the fairgrounds. Not a single boy in Odessa knew what was in them.

You could only make a rough shot: wax figures, magicians' tables, or flat, heavy snakes with filmy eyes and forked tongues.

One of the trunks was known to contain a mermaid with a lady's bust and a scaly tail instead of legs. But how did she get along without water? Could there be a bath-tub inside the trunk? Or was she packed in wet mud? All you could do was guess.

Petya was dying for the fair to open. It seemed to him that nothing was ready, that the whole thing would fall through, that this year the fair would never open at all.

But his fears proved groundless. By Easter Sunday all was ready: the pictures hung, the flagpoles

whitewashed, and the square generously sprinkled from long green barrels which had been carted between the booths all the previous day and had darkened the dry earth with their glistening rakes of water.

In a word, Easter came and blossomed exactly according to calendar.

The bells pealed monotonously. A fresh-looking sun raced along among fluffy clouds. Auntie Tatyana, in a white lace dress, sliced a ham, turning back rind as thick and curved as the holster of a revolver.

Sugar lambs covered the Easter cakes. A pink Christ holding a paper church banner flew through the air on a wire, like a ballet dancer. Round a green hill of watercress lay coloured eggs polished so glossy with butter that they reflected the newly washed windows.

Curly hyacinths in bowls wound with crinkly pink paper gave off their stiflingly sweet and at the same time grave-yardish odour; a fragrance so heavy that you could almost see it rising as smoky lilac strands in the sunshine above the Easter table.

But Easter Sunday, for Petya, was the longest and dreariest day of all, because no public entertainment or merry-making whatsoever was allowed. That day the police dedicated to God. But at noon on the following day—with the permission of the authorities—the public began to make merry.

At the stroke of twelve the police officer on duty blew his whistle, and the tricoloured flag was run up

on the tall whitewashed pole in the middle of Kulikovo Field.

The next instant everything broke loose. The Turkish drums of the regimental bands struck up. The hurdy-gurdies and merry-go-round organs began to blare. From the whitewashed platforms of the booths came the shrill, baboon-like, guttural cries of the red-headed clowns and jugglers calling to the public. The glass beads and carriages and horses of the merry-go-round began to whirl.

The fragile little swing-boats flew up into the dizzying blue of the cloud-spotted sky. From all sides came the insistent and unceasing clang of brass bells and triangles.

A vendor passed carrying on his head a gleaming pitcher of coloured icy water in which swam a few slices of lemon, a piece of ice and a dusty silver sun.

A pock-marked Port Arthur veteran in a shaggy black Caucasian fur cap had taken off his boots and was climbing the greased pole for the prize razor and shaving brush at the top.

The dizzying carnival in Kulikovo Field thundered away for seven days from noon to sunset; it filled the Batchei home with the din and hubbub of merry-making crowds from the outlying working-class districts.

Petya spent his days, from morn to dusk, in Kulikovo Field. For some reason he felt certain that he would meet Gavrik there. Many a time he sighted in the crowd a pair of lilac-coloured corduroys and a

naval cap with anchor buttons—that was what Gavrik had worn the Easter before—and ran in that direction, threading his way through the crowd, but always in vain.

It smacked somehow of Near Mills, this carnival of the common people where many of the men carried thin iron canes like Terenti's and a great many of the girls wore blue earrings like Motya's.

But Petya's hopes did not come true. The last day of the fair drew to an end. The bands played the "Longing for Home" march for the last time. The flag was lowered. Police whistles trilled. The ground emptied. It was all over until next Easter.

A sad and sullen sunset glowed long in the sky beyond the garish, startlingly quiet booths, beyond the iron wheels of the motionless tip-overs, beyond the bare flagpoles.

The unbearably mournful silence of the holiday just over was broken only now and then by the lion's deep, blood-curdling roar and the hyena's jerky laughter.

In the morning wagons came, and two days later not a trace of the fair remained. Kulikovo Field was again a black, dreary square from which all day long came the sing-song voices of sergeants drilling their men:

"Right turn! One-two!"

"Left turn! One-two!"

"About turn! One-two!"

The days kept growing longer, and more and more difficult to fill. Then one day Petya went to the seashore to pay Gavrik a visit.

43

THE SAIL

Grandpa was dying.

Gavrik knew this, and so did Motya and her mother, and so did Petya, who now spent his days on the shore.

Grandpa knew it too.

He lay from morning to night on a sagging iron bed which had been carried out of the hut, into the warm April sunshine.

When Petya came up to say hello the first time he was embarrassed by the white transparency of Grandpa's face and its faint bluish glow against the red pillow.

A clear, composed face, with a longish white beard, it had a beauty and dignity that struck Petya. But the most amazing and most disturbing thing about the face was that it seemed ageless, already beyond the limits of time.

"Hello, Grandpa," said Petya.

The old man turned his eyes with their bloodless violet lids and looked long at the boy in the Gymnasium uniform, but apparently without recognition.

"It's me, Petya, from Kanatnaya and the corner of Kulikovo."

Grandpa gazed into the distance without stirring.

"Don't you remember him, Grandpa? He's the one you made a lead sinker for last year."

A shadow of remembrance, as distant as a cloud, flickered in the old man's face. He smiled a clear, conscious smile, showing his gums.

"A sinker," he said softly, but without any special effort. "Yes. A lead sinker."

Chewing his lips, he gave Petya a fond look.

"You've sprung up. That's good. Go play now, my child. Play with pebbles on the beach. Go play. Only be careful and don't fall in the water."

He evidently took Petya for a little child, something like his great-grandson Zhenechka who was crawling about in the yellow dandelions nearby.

From time to time the old man lifted his head to take an admiring look at his household.

Since the arrival of Terenti's family the place had become unrecognisable. It was as if they had brought a corner of Near Mills with them.

Terenti's wife had freshened the clay floor for Easter and had whitewashed all the walls, inside and outside.

The windows of the rejuvenated hut had been washed and bordered with blue, and they gleamed merrily in the sunshine.

Round the hut grew green irises, now about to blossom. Among them Motya had laid out her dolls, representing society ladies at their summer villas.

Linen of different colours was drying on the lines. Motya, her hair like a boy's, was watering the

vegetable patch, pressing the big watering-can to her stomach with both hands. The dog Rudko, smiling sourly, ran up and down fastened to a wire between two posts. Near the vegetable patch, smoke was curling from a clay stove with a bottomless iron pot fitted into it for a chimney. There was the delicious smoky smell of gruel.

Motya's mother, in a gathered skirt, was bent over a trough. All about her soap bubbles floated in the air.

Occasionally Grandpa had the feeling that time had turned back, and he was forty again. Grandma had just whitewashed the hut. His grandson Terenti was crawling among the dandelions. On the roof lay a mast wrapped in a brand-new sail.

Now he would heave the mast on his shoulder, take the oars and the red-leaded wooden rudder under his arm, and go down to the shore to rig the boat.

But the lapses of memory were short-lived. The old man would suddenly feel weighed down by household cares. He would laboriously raise himself on his elbow and call Gavrik.

"What do you want, Grandpa?"

The old man would chew his lips for a long time as he gathered his strength.

"The boat—not carried away, is it?" he would finally ask, his eyebrows lifting sadly, like two little gable roofs.

"It's safe, Grandpa. You'd better lie down again." - "It ought to be tarred—"

"I'll tar it, Grandpa, don't you worry. Now lie back."

Grandpa would lie back obediently, but a minute later he would call Motya.

"What are you doing there, my child?"

"Watering the potatoes."

"Clever girl. Yes, give 'em plenty of water. The weeds— are you pulling 'em out?"

"I am, Grandpa."

"Or else they'll choke everything. Well, go, my child. Play with your dolls for a while. Take a rest."

Again Grandpa would fall back heavily.

But then Rudko would start barking, and the old man would turn angry bushy eyes in the dog's direction. "Down, Rudko! Quiet, damn you!" He thought he was calling to the playful dog in a commanding shout. But actually he spoke in a murmur.

Most of the time Grandpa lay motionless, gazing into the distance. Between the two low hills on the shore he could see a triangle of blue with a great many fishing sails. As he looked at them the old man carried on a leisurely conversation with himself.

"Yes, that's true. The wind loves a sail. A sail makes all the difference in the world. A sail will take you wherever you want to go. You can go to Dofinovka, if you want, or you can go to Lustdorf. With a sail you can go to Ochakov, and to Kherson, and even all the way to Eupatorium. But if all you have is oars, and no sail—why, it's a joke! It'll take you a good four hours to row to Bolshoi Fontan. And another four hours back. Yes, a fisherman needs a sail. Without a sail it's

no use putting out to sea. It's a disgrace. A boat without a sail is the same as a man without a soul."

Grandpa thought about a sail all the time.

That was since the night Terenti had dropped in for a minute to see the family. He had brought the children presents, given his wife three rubles for provisions, and said that he would try to see about a new sail in a couple of days.

From then on Grandpa became more cheerful.

His days were filled with dreams of the new sail. He could see it as clearly as if it stood before him: taut, strong, billowing in the fresh breeze.

Worn out by his constant thoughts of the sail, Grandpa would fall into a state of semi-consciousness. He would no longer know where he was or what he was doing. Only his senses were alive.

Little by little his awareness of what was himself and what not himself would begin to fade. He merged, as it were, with the world about him, turning into odours, sounds, colours. . ..

A cabbage butterfly with lemon-coloured veins on its ivory wings fluttered by. He was the butterfly, and at the same time he was the flight of the butterfly.

A wave broke over the pebbles. He was its refreshing noise. His lips became salty from spray carried over by the wind. He was the wind and the salt.

A child sat among the dandelions. He was that child, and he was also those bright chicken-yellow flowers towards which the child's hands reached.

He was the sail, the sun, the sea. .. . He was all.

But he did not live to see the sail.

When Petya came to the shore one morning he did not find Grandpa near the hut. A bench had been set up where his bed usually stood, and a tall old man with a Kiev cross hanging from his dark neck was planning a board.

A long taut shaving twisted itself out of the plane.

Nearby stood Motya in tight shoes and a brand-new but unattractive print dress.

"Grandpa died today," she said, coming up close to the boy. "Do you want to look?"

She took Petya's hand in her own cold hand and, trying to keep her shoes from squeaking, led him into the hut.

Grandpa lay on the same sagging bed, his eyes closed and bulging, his chin tied with a handkerchief. His big hands were folded high on his chest, over the icon of St. Nicholas, and held a small yellow candle. A column of such bright and hot sunlight came through the clean-washed window that the candle flame was not seen at all. There was only a little hollow of melted wax and the black hook of the wick surrounded by wavy air to show that the candle was burning.

Two days later Grandpa was buried.

The night before the funeral Terenti came. He knew nothing of Grandpa's death. On his shoulder he carried a huge, heavy package—the promised sail.

He dumped it in the corner and stood for a while looking down at Grandpa in the unpainted pine coffin.

Then, without crossing himself, he firmly kissed the old man on his hard, icy lips and went out in silence.

Gavrik accompanied Terenti along the shore as far as Maly Fontan. Terenti gave him some instructions about the funeral, which, of course, he would not be able to attend, then shook hands and disappeared into the darkness.

...Four blond-moustached fishermen carried Grandpa on their shoulders in the light open coffin.

In front, next to the undertaker in a tattered dress-suit, who carried a crude cross on his shoulder, walked Gavrik, clean, washed, neatly combed. On a towel he carried a huge clay bowl of *kolevo.*

Behind the coffin walked Motya's mother with Zhenechka in her arms, Motya, Petya, and a few neighbours, fishermen, in their Sunday best. There were eight of them in all. But as the procession approached the cemetery it grew larger and larger.

In some mysterious way news of the funeral of the old fisherman who had been beaten up in jail had spread all along the shore from Langeron to Lustdorf.

Whole families and groups of fishermen—from Maly Fontan, Sredny Fontan, Valtukh, Arcadia, and Zolotoi Bereg—came out of seaside lanes to join the procession.

Now a crowd of about three hundred marched in deep silence behind the pauper's coffin of Grandpa.

It was the last day of April. Rain was gathering. Sparrows with outspread wings were bathing in the soft dust of the lanes. A grey asphalt sky hung over the

gardens. Against it the monotonous young green of the trees, hanging limp in expectation of the rain, stood out sharply.

Cocks crowed sleepily in the backyards. Not a single ray of sunshine came through the thick, muggy clouds.

Near the cemetery the procession was joined by factory-hands and railwaymen from Chumka, Sakhalinchik, the Odessa Goods Station, Moldavanka, and Near and Distant Mills. The policeman on duty at the cemetery looked in alarmed surprise at the huge crowd streaming through the gates.

Like the city, the cemetery had its main street, cathedral square, central district, boulevard, and poverty-stricken outskirts. Death, too, seemed helpless before the power of wealth. Even after he died a man remained either rich or poor.

The crowd silently walked down the main street of the shady town of the dead, past marble, granite, and labradorite family vaults—those small, luxurious villas behind whose wrought-iron fences haughty stone angels with lowered wings stood amid the black greenery of cypress and myrtle.

Each plot of land here had been bought at a fabulous price and was owned by dynasties of the rich.

The crowd passed the central section and turned down a less wealthy street which had no villas, no mausoleums. Behind the iron fences lay marble slabs bordered by bushes of lilac and yellow acacia. The rains had washed the gilt from the carved names; small

cemetery snails covered the marble plaques, greyed by time.

Then came wooden fences and mounds covered with sod.

After that were tedious rows of barren soldiers' graves with crosses as alike as rifles at the present.

But even this section of the cemetery was too prosperous for Grandpa. He was buried near the wall, in a narrow glade strewn with the purple shells of Easter eggs. Behind the wall the caps of mounted police could already be seen. The mourners formed a close circle around the grave. The light pauper's coffin was slowly let down with strips of linen.

On every side Petya saw lowered faces and big black hands crumpling workers' and fishermen's caps.

The silence was so complete and so sullen, and the air so stifling, that the boy felt something dreadful would happen in Nature—a tornado, a hurricane, an earthquake —at the first sharp sound.

But oppressive silence reigned.

Motya was also depressed by the silence. With one hand she held on to Petya's Gymnasium belt and with the other to her mother's skirt. She stood motionless, watching the yellow mound of clay grow over the grave.

At last a faint, almost noiseless stir passed through the crowd. One after another, without hurrying or pushing, people came up to the fresh grave, crossed themselves, bowed low, and offered their hand first to Motya's mother and then to Gavrik.

Gavrik, who had given the bowl to Petya to hold, scooped up *kolevo* with a new wooden spoon and poured it into the cupped hands or the outstretched caps; he did it neatly, with a preoccupied frown, thriftily, giving a little to each so that there should be some for all. With tender respect, trying not to drop a single grain, each mourner put the *kolevo* into his mouth and walked away to give his place to another.

This was all that Grandpa's family could offer to the friends and acquaintances who shared their grief.

To some of the fishermen who came up for *kolevo* Gavrik bowed and said, "Terenti sends you his regards. He asks you not to forget the May Day outing at twelve o'clock tomorrow, in your own boats, opposite Arcadia."

"We'll be there."

Finally there were only four purple comfits left in the bowl.

Gavrik made a dignified bow to those for whom nothing remained, said, "Excuse us", and distributed the four sweets among Zhenechka, Motya, and Petya, not forgetting himself, either.

"It's not bad," he said as he handed Petya the sweet. "Krakhmalnikov Brothers. Eat it, in Grandpa's memory. Will you come to the May Day outing with us tomorrow?"

"I will," Petya said. He faced the grave and bowed low, as everybody else had.

The crowd slowly dispersed. The cemetery became deserted. Somewhere in the distance, on the other side

of the wall, a lone voice started to sing. A chorus of voices joined in:

Farewell, comrade, you honestly trod
Your valorous, noble path. . . .

But a police whistle immediately resounded. The song stopped. Petya heard running feet on the other side of the wall. Then all was quiet.

A few drops of rain fell on the grave. But the rain was only teasing; it stopped before it had really started. It became muggier and gloomier than ever.

Motya, her mother, Gavrik, and Petya crossed themselves for the last time and set out for home. Petya said good-bye to his friends at Kulikovo Field.

"So don't forget," said Gavrik significantly.

"Naturally." Petya nodded with dignity.

Then, with a show of nonchalance, he strolled up to Motya.

"Say, Motya," he whispered quickly, blushing with humiliation at having to ask a girl a question, "what's a May Day outing?"

Motya's face took on a strict, somewhat solemn expression.

"Workers' Easter," she replied.

44

THE MAY DAY OUTING

All night long a warm, gentle rain had fallen. It had started in April and ended in May; a little after eight o'clock the wind had carried away the last drops.

The sky had not yet cleared, and now it merged with the sea, from which rose a steaming mist; there was no horizon. The bathing huts seemed to hang in milky air. Glossy, curving reflections of the piles swayed in the bottle-green water.

Not only was the water warm but it actually looked warm. Gavrik and Petya rowed along with pleasure.

At first they bore down hard, to see who could outpull the other. But Petya was no match for Gavrik. The little fisherman easily got the upper hand over the Gymnasium pupil, and the boat kept describing circles.

"Stop your fooling, lads," Terenti called from his seat in the stern, where he was toying with his iron cane. "You'll overturn us."

The boys stopped competing but they immediately thought up a new game: who could row with the less splash?

Up until then they had not splashed much at all. But the moment they tried not to, spray flew from their oars as though on purpose. The boys began to shoulder and elbow each other.

"Get away, you tramp!" shouted Petya, doubling over with laughter.

"You're a tramp yourself!" Gavrik retorted, tightening his lips. Suddenly, quite by accident, his oar threw up such a fountain that Terenti barely managed to save himself by sliding to the floor of the boat.

The two boys choked with laughter. Petya laughed so hard that bubbles formed on his lips.

"Why all the splashing, you little hellhound?"

"None of your lip."

Terenti nearly lost his temper, but then he too was taken by a fit of irrepressible boyish merriment. Making a ferocious face, he gripped the gunwales and rocked the boat with all his might.

The boys rolled on top of each other and their heads knocked together. They cried blue murder. Then they began to pound the water madly with their oars, drenching Terenti from both sides.

Terenti did not let it go at that: he quickly bent over, turned aside his screwed-up face and, working his palms with lightning speed, shot water at the boys. In a minute all three were wet from head to foot. Laughing and sputtering, they lay back on the thwarts and moaned in exhaustion.

The wind was clearing away the mist. The sun dazzled the eye from the water as if a mirror had suddenly been placed beside the boat.

The shore emerged from the haze like a transfer picture.

A bright May day began to sparkle in all its blue, violet, and green colours.

"Well, we've had our fun, and that's that," Terenti said sternly. With his sleeve he wiped his wet forehead, across which ran a satiny white scar. "Let's be on our way."

The boys grew serious and leaned upon their oars.

Petya worked hard, puffing and sticking out his tongue. To tell the truth, he felt a bit tired. But he would never admit it in front of Gavrik.

Something else troubled him, too: he was dying to know whether the May Day outing had already begun or not. But he did not want to ask because he was afraid of making a fool of himself, as he had that time about Near Mills.

Motya had told him that a May Day outing was a workers' Easter. Well, they had been rowing along the shore a good half-hour now, but so far there was no sign of any Easter cake, or ham, or Easter eggs. But perhaps that was as it should be. It wasn't an ordinary Easter, after all, but a workers' Easter.

Finally the boy could hold out no longer.

"I say there," he asked Terenti, "has the May Day outing started yet?"

"No, not yet."

"When will it, then? Soon?"

The minute the words were out of his mouth Petya prepared an exaggeratedly gay and flattering smile.

From his many years of experience in conversing with adults he knew what would follow. "It'll start when it begins." "But when will it begin?" "When it starts."

To Petya's surprise, however, Terenti answered him as if he were a real grown-up.

"First we'll pick someone up at Maly Fontan and then we'll begin."

At Maly Fontan they really did pick up a passenger: a dandified gentleman carrying a cane and a string bag. In a single leap he was in the boat and sitting beside Terenti. He threw a furtive glance at the shore and said, "Turn to. Cast off."

It was the sailor.

But—my God! How elegant he was!

The boys gaped at him, enraptured and at the same time crushed by his unexpected splendour. They had never imagined a human being could be so magnificent.

He wore cream-coloured trousers, green socks and dazzling white canvas shoes. But that was not all.

A red silk handkerchief showed from the pocket of his navy-blue jacket, and a sapphire horseshoe gleamed in his tie with the "peacock's eye" design. But that was not all.

He wore a bulging starched shirt-front, and a starched collar with wings turned down like a visiting card propped his cheeks. But that was not all.

A straw hat with a striped ribbon sat at a dashing angle on the back of his head.

But that was not all.

A watch chain with a mass of trinkets on it dangled across his stomach, and on his hands, with their elegantly crooked fingers, were grey cloth gloves. That was the finishing touch.

While up until now the boys had not definitely settled who were the grandest beings on earth—Army

Staff clerks or *kvass* vendors—now it was laughable even to consider the question.

One could boldly, sight unseen, give up all the *kvass* vendors and all the staff-clerks for the sailor's curly little moustache.

The boys were so busy looking at the dandy that they forgot all about rowing.

"Look, Petya!" Gavrik exclaimed. "Look—he's wearing gloves!"

The sailor spat through his teeth, farther than the boys had ever spat in their dreams. "Why should everybody be able to see my anchor?" he said, with an angry glance at Gavrik. "I covered it up. Come now, lads, that's enough fooling."

He suddenly assumed an important air, twirled his moustache, glared at Terenti, who was bent double with laughter, and barked: "Ahoy there, you in the cutter! Listen to my command! Oars ready! Give way together! 'Un, 'un!" he sang out, acting the bosun. "Back starboard! Un, un!

The boys leaned on their oars. The boat turned to the open sea, towards the gleaming silver flame of midday.

Ahead of them, half a mile from shore, a cluster of fishing boats could be seen.

A burning feeling of exultant fear gripped Petya. Exactly the same feeling he had had in the autumn the first time he followed Gavrik into a section of the city surrounded by the police.

But then the boys had been alone. Now they were with powerful and mysterious grown-ups, who gave not the slightest sign that they had ever seen Petya before.

Petya knew, however, that they remembered him very well. Once the sailor even winked at him, as if to say, "Here we are, brother, still alive and kicking!"

For his part, Petya also made believe he was seeing the sailor for the first time in his life.

All this made it jolly, although a bit upsetting. In general, the occupants of the boat were in a keyed-up and somehow over-joyous mood.

Soon the boat was among a host of other fishing craft bobbing up and down in one place opposite Arcadia, as arranged.

A whole flotilla of boats painted in different colours surrounded Grandpa's old, weather-beaten tub.

Gathered there were all the fishermen who the day before had walked behind Grandpa's coffin—fishermen from Maly Fontan, Sredny Fontan, Valtukh, Arcadia, and Zolotoi Bereg. There were some from farther off, from Lustdorf and Dofinovka, and even one from Ochakov.

They were all old friends and neighbours.

Taking advantage of the occasion, the fishermen were leaning over the sides of their boats and talking. They were making so much noise it sounded like a marketplace. Each new boat was greeted with shouts, jets of spray, and the splash of oars.

No sooner had Grandpa's boat, bumping and scraping against other boats, made its way into the circle, where a few empty Sanzenbacher beer bottles already floated, when cries came from all sides:

"Hi, Terenti!"

"Easy there! You'll sink our tubs with your iron-clad!"

"Hey, you tramps, make way for the chief politico!"

"Say, Terenti old boy, where'd you pick up that dandy of yours? The Lord preserve us! Oo-la-la, oui-oui, par-ley-voo!"

Terenti waved his cap, puffed out his cheeks and bowed to all sides with a show of bashful self-importance.

"Don't pounce on me all at once!" he piped. "At least take turns. Greetings, Fedya! Greetings, Stepan!

Greetings, Grandpa Vasili! Ah, Mitya? Still alive? I was sure the Maly Fontan bullheads had swallowed you up long ago! Tell me—how many of you to the pound, dried? Sasha, swing round to the left!"

Terenti grinned and screwed up his face as he bantered with his old pals. He looked about him with satisfaction, reading aloud the names of the boats.

"Sonya, another *Sonya*, and another *Sonya*, and again *Sonya*, and *Sonya* from Lustdorf, and another three from Langeron. Hah! Eight Sonyas to one little me! *Nadya, Vera, Lyuba, Shura, Motya*. . .. Oh, mother of mine! What sort of place is this? I want to go home!" he cried in mock horror, covering his face with his cap.

There were also about four *Olgas*, half a dozen *Natashas*, not less than a dozen *Three Bishops*, and a big Ochakov boat with the intriguing name *Good Old Pushkin*.

When silence and order finally set in, Terenti nudged the sailor with his elbow.

"Begin, Rodion."

The sailor unhurriedly removed his hat, put it in his lap, and combed his moustache with a tiny comb. Then he stood up and, placing his legs wide apart for balance, said in a loud, clear voice, so that everybody could hear him, "Hello, comrade fishermen of Odessa! May Day greetings to you all!"

His face instantly became bony, snub-nosed, decisive.

"From what I just heard, some of you folks would like to know who I am and how I come to be here—an elegant gentleman in gloves and a starched shirt, ooo-la-la, parley-voo, and all that. Well, I can tell you that I'm a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, the Bolshevik faction, and I was sent here to you by the Odessa Joint Committee. Also that I'm just the same kind of worker and sailor as all of you here. And now about the starched shirt and the white trousers and the rest of it. I'll explain that with a question of my own. All of you here are Odessa fishermen and you probably can tell me the answer. Why does the mackerel wear such a beautiful sky-blue skin with dark-blue stripes, like watered silk? You don't know? Then I can tell you. So that it won't be

seen in our blue Black Sea, and so that it won't be so easy for you to catch it on your fishermen's hooks. Is that clear?"

There was laughter in the boats. The sailor winked, shook his head, and said, "Well, I'm just like that fish who specially puts on the kind of coat you won't notice right off."

Louder laughter came from the boats.

"A whopper of a fish!"

"A whole dolphin!"

"Ain't you afraid of being hooked some day?"

The sailor waited until the calls stopped, and then remarked, "Just try and catch me. I'm slippery."

Then he continued:

"I look round me, comrades, and I can't help thinking of our sea and our land. The sun shines bright. The sea is chock-full of all kinds of fish. The fields are chock-full of wheat. In the orchards there's all kinds of fruit: there's apples and apricots and cherries and pears. There's grapes. In the steppe there's horses and oxen and cows and sheep. Down underground there's gold and silver and iron and everything else. What more could anybody want? There's plenty for everybody, or so it would seem. Plenty, so it would seem, for everybody to be happy and satisfied. But what do you think? No! Everywhere there's always the rich, who don't do a stroke of work but take everything for themselves. And everywhere there's the poor, who work day and night like the damned and don't have a damned thing to show for it! How is that? I can tell you the answer. It's very simple. Take the fisherman. What does he do? He fishes. He pulls in a catch and takes it to market. And how much do you think he gets at the

market, say, for a hundred bullheads? Thirty or forty kopeks!"

The sailor paused and glanced round.

"You're lucky if you get thirty," said an old man who looked like Grandpa and was lying in the bow of a clumsy boat named the *Dolphin*. "Day before yesterday I brought in four hundred and she wouldn't give me more than twenty-five—take it or leave it! And the next minute she started selling 'em herself for eighty."

All the fishermen began to speak at once. The sailor had touched their sorest spot. Some complained that it was a dog's life if you had no sail. Others shouted that the market had them by the throat.

While the grown-ups were making so much noise the boys did not miss their opportunity. Some of the fishermen had brought their children along on the outing. In the boats sat well-mannered girls in a brand-new print frocks and barefoot scowling boys with shiny patches of skin on their apricot cheeks. They wore sateen Russian blouses and fishermen's caps with anchor buttons. All of them, naturally, were Gavrik's pals.

And naturally, they started to make no less noise than the grown-ups.

They immediately began to tease one another, and before two minutes had passed a regular sea battle was on. Gavrik got it in the face with a dead bullhead, while Petya's cap fell into the water and nearly sank.

There was so much noise and such splashing that Terenti yelled, "Shut up, everybody, or else I'll have to tear all your ears off!"

"So it comes out," the sailor continued, shouting above the din, "that the bosses rob us of three-quarters of what we earn by the sweat of our brow. And what do we do about it? The minute we raise our heads they give it to us over the noggin with a sword. Crack! They're still thrashing us, comrades, and pretty hard, too. We raised the red flag on the *Potemkin* but we weren't able to hold out. We started an uprising, and the same thing happened. It's awful to think of how much of our working-class blood has been spilled all over Russia! How many of our brothers have perished on the scaffold, in the tsarist torture chambers, in the dungeons of the secret police! I don't have to tell you. You know it yourself. Only yesterday you buried a fine old man of yours, who quietly and modestly gave his life so that his grandsons and great-grandsons might be happy. His noble old worker's heart had stopped beating. His soul, so precious to us all, has flown away. Where is it now? It's gone, never to return. For all we know it may be flying above us now, like a gull, and is happy to see that we aren't giving up our cause but intend to fight again and again for our freedom—to fight until we finally throw the hated government from our backs."

The sailor fell silent. He wiped his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief. The wind played with the piece of red silk as if it were a small banner.

Deep, complete silence reigned over the boats.

On shore, police whistles were already sounding the alarm. The sailor looked in that direction and winked.

"Our friends are getting worried. Never mind. Let the pigs squeal, for all the good it'll do 'em!"

He thumbed his nose fiercely at the shore, which was sprinkled with elegant umbrellas and panamas.

An instant later the handsome Fedya, lounging in the stern of his magnificent boat, the *Nadya and Vera*, struck up the "Longing for Home" march on his concertina.

Coloured eggs, dried sea-roaches, bread, and bottles appeared in all the boats as if out of nowhere.

The sailor dug into his string bag and produced some refreshments, which he divided equally among everybody in the boat. Petya's share was a wonderful dried sea-roach, two monastery rolls and a purple egg.

The May Day outing really did prove to be a merry workers' Easter.

Policemen ran along the shore, whistling. The boats began to pull away in different directions.

From the other side of the horizon rose plaster-of-Paris heads of clouds.

Fedya turned his face up to the sky and dropped his arm over the side of the boat. In a clear, strong tenor he began to sing the famous sailor's song:

The sea is broad and deep,
And land is seen no more.
Comrade, were sailing far—

Far from our native shore.

Oars flashed. The song floated on.

"Comrade, I'm done for, I cannot go on,"
The stoker then said to his mate. . . .

Now the song could barely be heard. "Oars ready!" the sailor ordered the boys. "Give way together!"

Clapping Terenti on the back, he sang out:

A small white ship
In the deep Black Sea.
Soon my darling sailor
Will come home to me.

"Come on, you tramps! Why don't you help?" Terenti and the two boys gaily chimed in:

Weep no more, Marusya,
You will yet be mine.
Soon I will sail back to you
Across the foamy brine.

A white seagull glided noiselessly over the boat on outspread wings. It was as if the gull had caught the gay song in flight and carried it off in its coral beak like a fluttering silver fish.

For a long time the boys followed the bird with their eyes, wondering whether this could be Grandpa's

snow-white soul come to look at his boat and at his grandsons.

The May Day outing was over.

But they did not come in to the shore right away. They circled about in the sea for another two hours or so, waiting for the right moment.

First they dropped Terenti off near Zolotoi Bereg, and then they took the sailor to Langeron.

Before stepping ashore the sailor looked round for a long time. Finally he waved his hand, said, "Well, here's trusting to luck", put his smart cane with its horse's head handle of German silver under his arm, and jumped out of the boat.

"Thanks, lads," he said hastily. "Till our next pleasant meeting."

With these words he disappeared in the crowd of promenaders.

Petya returned home by dinner-time, with blisters on his palms and a face burned a deep red in one day.

45

A FAIR WIND

A week passed.

During this time Petya did not make a single visit to the shore. He was busy getting ready to leave for the farm. He went into town, sometimes with Daddy, sometimes with Auntie Tatyana, to buy things.

Real summer had already come.

In Odessa, there is no difference at all between May and June. The city was sweltering. Striped awnings with curved red trimming had been lowered over balconies and shop-fronts. On them lay the clear-cut shade of acacias just beginning to bloom.

Dogs ran along with their tongues hanging out, looking for water. Between the houses, a view of a flaming sea would suddenly open up. In the "Centre", money-changers and flower-girls sat at little green tables under big canvas sunshades.

Your heels sank into the soft asphalt. Here and there and everywhere, tar was bubbling in hellish cauldrons.

What fun it was to spend the whole day going from one shop to another, buying holiday things for the country: a hoop, sandals, butterfly nets, fishing rods, rubber balls, fireworks .. . and then to come home on the open summer horse-tram with all those light odd-shaped packages!

Petya's body was still languishing in the sultry city but his impatient spirit had flown far ahead: it was already on the steamer, it floated along in the blue breeze of voyage.

But early one morning a familiar whistle sounded. Petya ran to the window and saw Gavrik in the middle of the courtyard.

A minute later he was downstairs. Gavrik looked unusually worried. His greyish face, his tightly pressed lips and the unnatural brightness in his eyes meant that some misfortune had taken place.

Petya's heart contracted.

"What's up?" he asked, lowering his voice to a whisper without being aware of it.

Gavrik frowned and turned aside.

"Nothing. Want to go out with us in the boat?"

"When?"

"Now. Me, Motya, and you. Under sail."

"You're lying."

"Only dogs lie."

^Under sail?"

"You can spit in my eye."

"For a trip?"

"Call it a trip. Coming?"

"What a question!"

"Then be snappy!"

A trip in the boat, under sail!

Naturally Petya did not bother to go back for his cap. Ten minutes later the boys were on the shore.

The boat, with the mast in place and a furled sail on it, lay half in the water, rocking gently.

Motya, barefooted, stood inside. She was busy putting the oaken water-keg and a big loaf of rye bread into the box at the stern.

"Give us a hand, Petya," said Gavrik, putting his shoulder to the stern.

The boys pushed off without any special difficulty and then jumped in.

"We're off!"

Gavrik skilfully unfurled and set the new rectangular sail. The light breeze slowly filled it. The

boat heeled. Kneeling in the stern, Gavrik attached the heavy rudder with an effort and fixed the tiller to it.

The boat, yielding to the rudder, went straighter.

"Look out!"

Petya squatted and ducked just in time. The boom, turned by the wind, swung heavily from left to right directly over his head, opening up the glistening sea and hiding from sight the clay shore where Motya's mother, shading her eyes with her hand, stood knee-deep in the weeds and wild parsley.

Gavrik bore down on the tiller and put the weight of his back to it. The mast tipped. The water along the side began to gurgle. Bouncing up and slapping the waves with its flat bottom, the boat came out into open water and then sailed along parallel with the shore. "Where to?" Petya asked,

"You'll see."

"Far?"

"You'll find out."

That hard, tense light came into Gavrik's eyes again.

Petya looked at Motya. She sat on the prow with her bare legs hanging over the sides and stared straight in front of her. Her cheeks were pulled in sternly; the wind ruffled her hair, not yet long enough to be braided.

For some time all three were silent.

Suddenly Gavrik reached into his pocket and pulled out a rather large blue steel watch. He put it importantly to his ear, listened to its ticking, and then, not without difficulty, pried open the cover with a

fingernail that had a mass of little white spots on it—a sure sign, as everybody knows, of good luck.

Had Gavrik pulled out a squirming adder or a handful of precious stones, Petya would have been less surprised.

A pocket-watch of his own! Why, that was almost the same as owning a bicycle, or a Monte Cristo! Come to think of it, perhaps even more.

Petya caught his breath. He could not believe his eyes. He was crushed.

Meanwhile Gavrik was intently counting the numerals with his forefinger.

"One o'clock, two, three, four, five. . ." he mumbled. "Nine and a little bit more. That's all right. We'll make it on time."

"Let's see it!" cried Petya, overcome with amazement.

"Hands off, it's not for sale."

"Is it yours?"

"No."

Gavrik took Petya by the sleeve and pulled him close. "It's the Committee's," he whispered mysteriously. "See?"

"I see," Petya replied, also in a whisper, although he really did not see a thing.

"Now listen," Gavrik continued, glancing at Motya out of the corner of his eye. "Our sailor's caught. See? He's in jail. Been there five days. They caught him in Langeron, right after the May Day outing. But his papers are in a different name, and so far it's all right.

But if those snakes ever find out, you can say your prayers for him, because they'll hang him in a jiffy. See? And they can find out any minute. They can shave off his moustache and find some skunk who'll give him away. So now you see what a fix it is?"

"You're kidding!" Petya exclaimed in fright.

"If I said it it means I know what I'm talking about. Now listen to me. Before they find out who he is, the Committee's going to help him break out. Today. At half past ten on the dot he's going to break out of jail and go straight to Bolshoi Fontan. From there he'll sail in our boat back to Rumania. So now you know where we're going? To Bolshoi Fontan. We're taking the boat there. Terenti brought me the watch from the Committee so we won't be late."

Gavrik pulled out the watch again and examined it attentively.

"Almost ten. We'll be just on time."

"How will he break out?" Petya whispered. "What about the guards and the sentries?"

"That's nothing. At half past ten they let them out for a walk. In the prison yard. All he has to do is run across the vegetable patches to the Maly Fontan road. Terenti'll be waiting for him there in a droshky. Then they'll come straight to the boat. See?"

"Yes. But how'll he get over the prison wall? It's as high as anything. It's like the second storey. He'll start climbing and they'll shoot him down with their rifles."

Gavrik made a wry face as if he had eaten something sour.

"Naw! Listen. Why should he climb over the wall? Terenti'll blow it up."

"What do you mean?"

"You're a funny bloke. Just what I said: blow it up. He'll blow a hole in it. Last night a man from the Committee put dymanite under it. Today, on the dot of half past ten, just when our sailor's let out for a walk, Terenti'll light the fuse on the other side and run to the droshky. He'll wait. And then the dymanite'll go bang."

Petya gave Gavrik a stern look.

"What'll go bang?"

"The dymanite,"

"The what?"

"The dymanite," Gavrik repeated, but with much less confidence. "What explodes. Why?"

"Not dymanite but dynamite," Petya said, in the tone of a tutor.

"Call it whatever you want, as long as it blows that wall down."

Only now did the meaning of Gavrik's words sink in. Petya felt goose-flesh break out on his back.

He looked at his friend with big dark eyes.

"Swear it's true."

"Honour bright."

"Cross yourself."

"By the true and holy Cross on the church."

Gavrik faced the monastery cupolas of Bolshoi Fontan and quickly and fervently crossed himself. But Petya took his word for it without that. He had made

him cross himself just as a matter of form. Petya felt with all his heart that it was the truth.

Gavrik lowered the sail. The boat bumped against a small landing stage for rowing boats on a rugged and deserted shore.

"Got a handkerchief?" Gavrik asked Petya.

"Yes "

"Show it here."

Petya took out a handkerchief at the sight of which Auntie Tatyana surely would have fainted.

Gavrik, however, was quite satisfied with it.

"It'll come in handy," he said gravely, with an important nod. "Stow it away."

Then he looked at the watch. It was "ten and just a teeny bit more".

"I'll stay in the boat," Gavrik said, "and you and Motya run up to the top of the hill and stand in the lane. To meet 'em. The minute you see 'em wave your handkerchief and I'll put the sail. Understand, Petya?"

"Uh-huh. But what if the sentry kills them?"

"He'll miss," Gavrik said confidently, with a grim smile. "He comes from Dofinovka. He's a friend. Go up there now, Petya. As soon as you see 'em start waving. Can you do it?"

"What a question!"

Petya and Motya climbed out of the boat and ran up the hill.

Here, as everywhere along the shore from Lustdorf to Langeron, the children knew every path. Making their way through the bushes of wild lilac, the boy and

the girl reached the top of the high bluff and stopped in a lane between two villas.

From there they could see both the road and the sea.

Far below, a little boat was bobbing up and down next to an even smaller landing stage. Gavrik himself could barely be seen.

"Now listen, Motya," said Petya after he had sized up the situation. "I'll climb this mulberry tree because I can see further from there, and you keep a sharp eye out too. Let's see who sees 'em first."

To tell the truth, there was no need to climb the tree, for there was an excellent view from below. But Petya now felt that he was in command. He was eager to give orders and perform deeds.

He took a run and clambered up the tree, grunting. Before he knew it he had torn his trousers at the knees. But that did not disturb him. On the contrary, it only made him grimmer and prouder.

He straddled a branch and frowned.

"Well, what are you standing still for? Walk up and down!"

"Right away."

The girl looked up at Petya with frightened, devoted eyes, pulled her skirt straight with both hands, and set off sedately down the lane towards the road.

"Stop! Wait!"

Motya stopped.

"Now, listen. The minute you see 'em, yell to me. And the minute I see 'em I'll yell to you. All right?"

"All right," the girl said in a piping voice.

"Well, go ahead."

Motya turned and walked in the thick shade of greenish-milky acacias just about to bloom; in the dust she left imprints of her bare heels.

She went to the corner, stood there a while, and then came back.

"Not yet. How about your side?"

"Not on my side either. Go further."

The girl again went to the corner and again returned to say there was no sight of them on her side.

"The same here. Walk some more."

At first Petya liked this game very much.

It was uncommonly pleasant to sit high up in a tree and strain his eyes for the sight of a speeding carriage at the end of the lane.

How clearly he pictured it! The carriage flies up, drawn by a horse all in lather, with the coachman waving his whistling whip overhead. Terenti and the sailor jump out, revolvers in their hands. Prison guards run after them. Terenti and the sailor shoot it out with them. One after another the guards drop dead. Petya waves his handkerchief with all his might, jumps nimbly from the tree and speeds down the bluff, ahead of everybody else, to help put up the sail. As to Motya, she only now realises that it was they who came. But that can't be helped: she's nothing but a girl. . . .

But time passed, and no one drove up. It was becoming tedious.

Petya was tired of looking at the blinding white road. All that came by was a carriage with an English coachman dressed like Evgeni Onegin, and a thundering ice-wagon. After the ice-wagon, he felt especially hot and especially thirsty.

He had long since made a thorough examination of the nearby villa: a bright-green lawn, gravel on the walks, thuja trees, a statue spotted with purple blots of shadow, a vase from which long sharp leaves of aloe hung down, and an artist painting a landscape.

The artist, who had a curly little moustache, a pointed beard and a velvet beret, sat under an umbrella on a little folding chair with a duck seat. He was leaning back and poking at the canvas on the easel with a long brush.

He would take a poke and then a look, another poke and another look.

Fitted on his outstretched left thumb was his palette, that oval board which was much more beautiful than the picture itself; there, in mad but magic disorder, were mixed all the colours and shades of the sea, sky, clay, lilacs, grass, clouds, the boat. . . .

In the meantime the dusty carriage had long since arrived and two men were coming slowly up the lane. Ahead of them ran Motya, shouting, "They've already come on my side. Wave your handkerchief! Wave it!"

Petya nearly fell off the tree. He pulled out his handkerchief and waved it desperately over his head.

The boat started to rock harder. Petya saw that Gavrik was jumping up and down and waving his hands.

Terenti and the sailor passed under the mulberry tree in which Petya sat. Sweat streamed down their fiery-red faces. Petya could hear their heavy breathing.

The sailor limped badly. He was without a hat, and his elegant cream-coloured trousers—the same trousers in which Petya had last seen him during the May Day outing—were torn and smeared with brick dust.

His shirt-front was dirty and half-torn, showing a bulging chest shiny from sweat.

The sailor's clenched fists looked as though they were bound with the blue cords of his veins. His moustache drooped. His cheekbones jutted out of his stubbly face. There was a hard sparkle in his eyes. His throat twitched.

"Hello!" cried Petya.

Terenti and the sailor looked up and grinned. Petya thought the sailor even winked at him.

But now they were already running down to the sea, leaving a cloud of dust behind them.

"I saw them first!" said Motya.

Petya climbed down from the tree. He made believe he had not heard.

The boy and the girl stood side by side looking down at the boat, which was setting sail.

They saw the small figure of the sailor jump in. The sail billowed out. The wind carried it away from shore

as though it were a petal. Now only Terenti and Gavrik stood on the landing stage. A minute later Terenti disappeared.

Gavrik remained alone. He waved to Petya and Motya, then started unhurriedly up the bluff.

Bouncing and cleaving the waves, the boat quickly made for the open sea, the bright-blue, heaving sea.

"He's all by himself," said Petya.

"That's all right. We put in some bread for him. A whole big loaf. And eight smoked sea-roaches."

Soon Gavrik joined Petya and Motya.

"Thank the Lord we got him off," he said, crossing himself. "It was some job!"

"What about the boat?" asked Petya. "Will it be lost?"

"Yes, it's lost," Gavrik said glumly, scratching the top of his head.

"How will you get along without a boat?"

"Never fear. We'll manage somehow."

There was nowhere to hurry to.

The children climbed over the fence and stopped quietly behind the artist.

The landscape was almost finished. They held their breath, spellbound by the miraculous appearance of a whole world on a little piece of canvas; a world altogether different from the real one yet at the same time exactly like it.

"The sea's there, but not the boat," whispered Motya. She laid her hand on Petya's shoulder, as though by accident, and tittered.

Just then the artist picked up a drop of white on a thin brush, and in the very middle of the canvas, in the lacquered blue of the sea he had just painted, he put a small bulging comma.

"The sail!" breathed Motya, enchanted.

Now the painted sea could not be told apart from the real one. Everything was the same. Even the sail.

Nudging one another, the children stood there for a long time looking now at the painting, now at the real and very broad open sea, in the misty blueness of which the little sail of Grandpa's boat, as light and airy as a seagull, was dissolving.

Below, the sea is crystal azure,
Above, the sun is gold aglow.
But it is storm the rebel thirsts for,
He will find peace in storm alone.

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VALENTIN KATAYEV

A WHITE SAIL GLEAMS